

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 33 : Number Four : Winter 2012



Embracing Discord

The Future of Religious Life

Dynamics of Transformational Leadership

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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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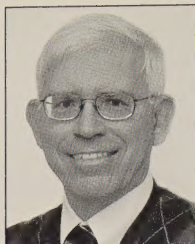
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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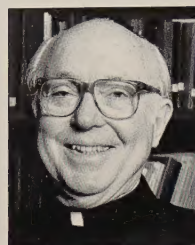
Letters are welcome and will be published as space permits and at the discretion of the editors. Such communications should not exceed 600 words and are subject to editing.

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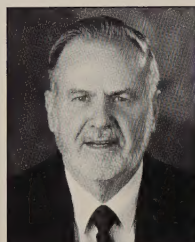
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The quarterly magazine HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by Regis University. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$49.00; all other countries, \$53.00. Online subscription: \$24.00 for one year. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$10.00 plus shipping; all other countries, \$10.00 plus shipping. Non-profit postage rate paid in Denver, Colorado. Postmaster: Send address changes to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 2012 by DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE, P.O. Box 217, Old Saybrook, CT 06475. Phone: (203) 809-0840 / E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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# Editor's Page

## What More Can I Do?

I recently visited Regis University in Denver, the Jesuit university that serves much of the western U.S. and that publishes *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE*. As I walked on the campus I noticed the many banners expressing the Jesuit values in higher education: "Finding God in All Things," "Men and Women for Others" and "Unity of Mind and Heart." There is also a beautiful statue of St. Ignatius and a multi-colored compass rose in the bricks with these values engraved in the various points. One word in particular caught my attention, "*Magis*."

*Magis* is a Latin word that means "more." It expresses a vital part of the Jesuit charism. It is said that Ignatius would often encourage his companions and those whom he served by asking them to consider: "What have I done for God? What am I doing for God? What more can I do for God?" The idea of *magis* includes generosity and self-sacrifice. But the response to the question "What more can I do," does not necessarily mean doing more things, adding one task upon another to the point of collapse. The response to the question that *magis* poses is neither simplistic nor burdensome.

The concept of *magis* is derived from the First Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises. Fr. John Reilly of Brisbane, Australia has offered this translation of the First Principle and Foundation:

As Christians we believe we come from a loving God who freely creates us to discover the mystery of God's love in our lives.

We believe God creates all things that we may find in them God's presence and energy by learning to share our lives with other people and to care for our kinship with all that wonderfully shares and supports our lives.

We find the beauty and mystery of our human lives, therefore, only by choosing, insofar as it is left to our free choice, what helps us to share our lives in love, not what hinders this.

For the freedom to love we need to hold ourselves open to all things—wealth or poverty, fame or disgrace, health or sickness, a long life or a short one, and to all else.

We need to let God grace us into a spiritual freedom, gratefully responsive to God's prior love in our lives, to desire and choose what better helps us live the love for which God made us. ([www.ignatianspirituality.com](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com), accessed October 20, 2112).

If this is the meaning and foundation of our lives—to desire and choose what better helps us live the love for which God made us—then the question, "What more can I do?" is about how we can better fulfill this purpose. The "more" that we choose is the choice that enables us to live our calling more

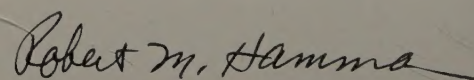
fully. Our response can only emerge from a prayerful stance of discernment. Fr. Fran Daly, S.J., puts the question this way: "Given my responsibilities, my gifts and talents, my weaknesses and limitations, how can I best embrace this desire to be a man or a woman for others? . . . There will be times after our reflection on our life situation when we need to say 'No, I cannot add one more task to my present commitments,' and this is operating from the Ignatian *Magis*" ([www.ignatianspirituality.com](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com), accessed October 20, 2112).

For each of us, the "more" emerges from our real lives here and now. It is about pursuing excellence in what we do and about the way we do it. We may not all accomplish great things in the eyes of others, but as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta was fond of saying, we can do small things with great love.

As I reflect on the purpose of this magazine, it becomes clear to me that while the value *magis* is not written into our mission statement it is, at heart, what we are about. As a Jesuit publication, *magis* is not only our heritage, but part of our DNA. As we strive to publish the best in contemporary reflection on a wide range of issues relating to human development, we hope to provide you, our readers, with the challenge and encouragement to discern the "more" you can do for Christ.

This issue offers a variety of perspectives on challenging areas of our lives as individuals and as a community. Fr. John Navone, S.J., invites us to return to silence to hear and encounter the Word there. "We cannot speak until we are spoken to," he reminds us. "To be human is to be answerable, response-able to and for each other, and to the mystery of God." This issue likewise explores the many ways we are responsible to one another. These range from the nitty-gritty process of working together in parishes ("Working Together: A Pastoral Coordinator and Priest Minister Offer Reflections" and "Committees: Advocates or 'Table-Setters'?") to dealing with conflict ("Embracing Discord") to the quality of our leadership ("Dynamics of Transformational Leadership"). And we continue to explore the challenges facing religious life in an excellent lead article, "Authentic Responses to the Future of Religious Life."

As the glow of the new year fades and Lent approaches, let us each ponder our answer to the question of *magis*, "What more can I do for Christ?"



Robert M. Hamma





# *Authentic Responses to the Future of Religious Life*



**R**eligious congregations in most first-world Anglo cultures are facing tremendous challenges. The rise of median ages of members, diminishing numbers and resources, as well as few new vocations require difficult discussions and decisions. Almost all religious communities are asking questions about their future, their viability and which actions should be taken to reverse these trends. Very often these conversations move quickly to the issue of survival, which in turn becomes an urgent question of what will bring in vocations. Others focus on renewal, conversion and transformation, hinting that perhaps they have done something wrong. Their reflections identify a lack of sufficient spirituality within their membership, little focus on vibrant community life and community apostolates and a correlative individualism. A subtle underlying theme points to a self-criticism that maybe they have been unfaithful to their call and are now paying the consequences.



Reprogramming members because of a fear of the future is not the only option and could do more harm than good. The religious landscape has changed in recent years. Both the church in general and the internal lives of religious have shifted. A return to an old model of religious life is not the only answer. The changes that have occurred in religious life since Vatican II were not all “bad” choices. The human and spiritual journey of religious over the past five decades has been rich and complex. There are no simplistic solutions to current problems.

In addition, there is a new generation of candidates who come with a different set of experiences and expectations. However, the same formation structures that shaped previous generations (a daily prayer schedule, intentional community activities, restricted outside involvement, focus on church teaching and distinguishable attire) are still needed to help new members develop their identity as religious. Formation programs and/or “receiving” communities can and should be deliberate about providing markers of identity for the new religious. Still there is need for continual renewal and conversion from attitudes and practices that may have secularized religious lifestyles. But like our religious journey, renewal and conversion are lifelong.

Through our work as consultants with dozens of religious congregations, we authors experience what many consider a narrow set of options. We believe that one size does not fit all religious groups as they discern their future. In fact it is the diversity of charisms, lifestyle, apostolic and spiritual expressions that make religious such a gift to the church and world. A response to the pressing issues facing religious congregations calls for an individual response by each religious community based on its unique history and reality. There are options.

We believe communities need to focus on authenticity—naming who they are as religious. Authenticity opens up a world of options and frees communities from the drudgery and fear of survival. Options that are appropriate to one community do not fit others. Yet,

there seems to be a trend to follow the latest survey or guru as a means to recreate religious lives. These insights and data can certainly inform us, but can also seduce us into thinking this is the quick fix or salvation for our group. In this article, we would like to look at a range of strategies that religious groups are exploring and implementing.

Through our experience of working with numerous men’s and women’s religious congregations we can see at least seven paths that can be taken. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, as there are likely more variations on these seven. Some groups are journeying on more than one of these paths at the same time.

## 1. NEW FORMS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Certainly we observe that new forms of religious life are emerging. The Neo-catechumenal Way has successfully created a new model that brings laity, religious and clergy together in service to the local church. While maintaining their individual identities and roles in the church they work collaboratively, in a structured way, to witness the gospel message. Members from different religious congregations have been attracted to their style of life and ministry, and have temporarily or permanently joined this expression of religious life. The witness of these communities is their missionary activity especially to those who have abandoned their faith.

Other groups have returned to more traditional forms of religious life. They focus on common apostolates, intentional community life, prayer practices and an identifiable garb. The 2009 NRVC/CARA *Study on Recent Vocations to Religious Life* reinforces the need for congregations such as these. Some young adult candidates, as well as some other age groupings, desire the formal structure and values that these communities provide. Many apostolic religious have come to see their ministry as a priority, supported by community life and prayer. Some new forms of religious life, actually reflecting a previously prevalent way of understanding and

constructing apostolic life, return to making spiritual practices and growth along with community the priority, which is then expressed in apostolic works.

## 2. TRANSFORMATION OF EXISTING COMMUNITY

A significant trend today is the focus on transformation of religious life in existing communities. These approaches are presented by writers who suggest paths for transformation or conversion based upon their academic discipline. Each has contributed an important piece to the larger puzzle of transformation of religious life.

- An early, and important, contribution was made by Gerald Arbuckle who seems to have coined the word *refounding*, which he defines as a “return to the sacred time of one’s culture or organizational roots.” The goal is to “take radical, creative steps to apply the founding experience to today’s most urgent needs.” From his anthropological view he believes that the transformation of an existing religious community comes from clarifying the purpose of the community, transforming leadership, living community, dealing with loss and grieving, and allowing the “new to belong elsewhere.”
- Patricia Wittberg provides an approach from a sociological perspective where she describes renewal and transformation as entering into a liminal time and describes the key steps in this process as linking passions, evaluating the response, implementing new scenarios and working through the dilemmas.
- Ted Dunn has been most prolific on the transformation process of existing religious communities. From his clinical psychology perspective he encourages a transformation of consciousness (a deeper listening), a re-appropriation of the charism, entering into conversion and reconciliation, and experimentation and learning, all of which bring about a new prophetic vision.
- Paul Michalenko has studied religious refounding and restructuring



from an organizational development perspective. What brings about transformation seems to be a mission-driven purpose and charisma, authentic leadership, and an inclusive engagement by the members that builds trust and is intentional about the personal and communal transitions required.

- There are others who have contributed to the body of knowledge and perspectives exploring the transformation of religious life from their unique disciplines that are not mentioned here.

Each one of the above comes from a specific discipline but some of the insights converge. From their work we see that transformation seems to involve:

- A call for a radical review of the founding charisma/vision/direction of the congregation.
- Dealing with interpersonal issues of grieving, transitions, reconciliation and trust so as to build and heal relationships (and create better expressions of community).
- The need for leaders able to enact and inspire transformation, to focus the change and model it in their actions.
- Risking new expressions of lifestyle, community life and ministry beyond what has been.

Transforming/converting/renewing a community is not an easy task. In fact, organizational culture experts such as Edgar Schein, author of *Organizational Culture and Leadership* point out that such transformations rarely succeed. Certainly a consistent alignment of what one professes and how one lives is needed.

We have not been able to identify any one group that has claimed to be "refounded" or transformed. Many have embarked upon the journey. They have created opportunities to re-imagine their future or recommit to fundamental values. The Croziers recommitted to living in larger communities rather than smaller ones. The Capuchins became clearer on their work with the poor, community life as a priority and wearing of the habit. A Conventual Franciscan province gathered as an entire province

for an extended retreat to re-establish a new vision and inter-personal connections. Valiant attempts have been made by these communities and many others. Some have resulted in a greater attraction to new vocations. But transforming people and organizations is difficult work.

Some religious communities have set up intentional communities so members can live a "renewed" religious lifestyle. Characteristics include a committed prayer life schedule, community life and even a common outreach to a ministry or neighborhood. In some cases it has caused divisions and criticism over who is living authentic religious life.

### 3. RESTRUCTURING OF RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

Another popular option that has been going on for twenty years or more has been the joining of provinces from the same tradition into a new province. This restructuring process becomes an all-consuming personal, communal, legal and canonical journey as separate provinces with their cultures are amalgamated into a new entity. The journey is intended to shake up the status quo and forge a new vision and direction for the future. One of the hopes of restructuring is that a sort of refounding or transformation will occur. The process often results in a better use of resources and a more efficient use of people and properties. A greater pool of leaders becomes available and opportunities for different staffing configurations in ministries becomes a possibility, when the members are willing to move. Along with the hope for positive change comes additional problems. Now leadership has to be concerned with a hundred elderly as opposed to thirty or fifty. There are sometimes conflicts over which ministries to continue to support. Problem personalities do not go away. Financial and institutional concerns still dominate the attention of leaders. Some are able to be creative with new expressions of ministry in response to the needs of the church today.

The timing and readiness for restructuring can create tension among

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provinces. Readiness to embark upon this journey differs depending on the province culture and history. Differing ideologies, theologies, spiritual practices and leadership styles can emerge. Some groups have to go through the process numerous times, incorporating new members into the new entity, which takes energy intended for ministry. The seemingly endless process and meetings become draining for some. For others restructuring has opened new possibilities and relationships.

Our observation is that restructuring of provinces in the U.S. has taken place for many groups. A number of communities are now considering other options, such as international restructuring, alliances and collaborations, transformation and intercultural communities.

#### 4. ALLIANCES AND COLLABORATIVE MODELS

Another model that has emerged is alliances with like-minded communities. Groups who chose not to restructure or combine provinces were open to collaboration on other levels. Common formation programs developed, as well as shared retirement facilities and sometimes shared personnel and resources for finance or human resource management. A major expression of alliances occurred in health care facilities that

formed large networks to share oversight and management. Schools also became institutions that collaborated with like-minded religious congregations to share talent for staffing the schools.

Eleven different congregations came together to support the future of Home Missions in the South and West. Under the umbrella of the Congar Institute, a Dominican-sponsored ministry, they shared their resources to insure an educated lay leadership in traditionally religious-staffed home mission territories. Other creative allied ministries continue to blossom in areas such as theological education and advocacy with international organizations such as the United Nations.

These sorts of alliances are not limited to the domestic U.S. church. With the international connections of many religious congregations, partnerships began to develop with foreign provinces. Financial support was often in place but now an exchange of personnel, formation opportunities and mission opportunities began to be developed. Some groups are exploring regional structures over country provinces. While more international and inter-cultural thinking can expand mission, certain language and cultural differences must be addressed. We foresee a growth in this area of international alliances and networking.





## 5. INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Some groups have chosen to become or expand their internationality. They have opened their doors to religious candidates of multiple cultures and ethnic/national origins. Many apostolic missionary groups find that they are serving a multi-ethnic church and that their membership should reflect the diversity of that church. This step has stretched and challenged many religious communities. Of course some see it as an answer to diminishing numbers. Many stories can be told of immigration nightmares, culture acclamation issues and low retention of vocations once in the country. Columban Father Sean Dwan sees intercultural living at four levels.

- The first level is “accidental;” we are together for mission, may the fittest survive.
- The second level is the “reluctant” community. It sees intercultural living as a series of problems to be solved, often with the majority culture winning.
- The third level sees interculturality as an “asset.” The community values it as a way of life, intentionally chosen, with structures in place to facilitate interaction and understanding among the members.
- The fourth level sees interculturali-

ty as a Gospel witness. Amidst a world filled with divisions, intercultural living gives witness to the Gospel as a prophetic reflection of the kingdom of God.

To embrace the last two levels of intercultural living, intentional dialogue on a regular and sustained basis is required. Much can be learned about intercultural formation and living from communities such as the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD), Glenmary Home Missioners, the Josephite Fathers and Brothers, the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity and others.

Many religious congregations have an ethnic heritage and over many years have attempted to become multi-cultural with various degrees of success. There are still deep scars for the minority ethnic groups who were often treated as second-class members in their own communities.

While many believe that multiculturalism has failed, intercultural living takes this experience to a whole other level. It requires deep listening and knowledge of cultural approaches to life at every level.

## 6. AUTHENTIC RESPONSE TO CURRENT REALITY

In our experience, options six (Authentic Response to Current Reality) and seven (Death and Leaving

a Legacy, below) are the ones about which there is the least writing and discussion. There is often the sense that these paths are not bold or prophetic and to follow them is to admit failure. We do not agree and view these responses as equally valid as the first five.

An authentic response to a community’s current reality begins by asking the question of what can be done given the realities of age, numbers, finances, etc. Members of the community must honestly address who they are today and let go of the images of the community that they joined. This is often very challenging. At times we have provided members of communities with print-outs that simply showed the names of each member, his/her age and current ministry. Only by taking this step could we get congregations to recognize some essential facts that these data uncovered. For example, one congregation saw that only ten percent of their members are still under the age of 60. Another congregation noted that, while their community was founded to run schools, close to half were engaged in ministries outside of schools. In short, the first step is to look calmly at the current reality—and to move away from denial about what the community once was or should be. Groups need to realistically assess where they want to put their energy, personnel and resources and where they need to let go.



The next step is to ask a simple question: "What is the Spirit calling us to and what is our authentic response to this reality?" For example, a community that once ran hospitals is now fully divested from them. Their community is smaller in number than it was when they ran the hospitals. In addition, newer members entering the community are not interested in hospital administration. As they explored the question of their authentic response, they discerned that they are called to a ministry of healing. This takes multiple forms. Some work as hospital chaplains, others as counselors. One member is a nutritionist. But the common theme is helping people on the journey to wholeness and healing.

Pursuing this path usually brings charges from some members that the community is not being prophetic or radical enough. Yet there is actually the opportunity for deep conversion here. As one congregational leader remarked, "I had equated God with the size of our institutions. This process forced me to reexamine that and ask myself who God really is and what he is calling us to."

As congregations reevaluate their existing structures, institutions and personnel needs, some are finding that placing competent and skilled lay peo-

ple in positions previously held by vowed members is a viable option. Offices such as province treasurer or secretary can be ably filled by lay persons, freeing up a vowed person for other ministry assignments. A decade ago, in 2001, Georgetown University installed a lay president, Jack DeGioia. One Jesuit commented to us, "Jack knows as much about Ignatian spirituality as any Jesuit. We are in good hands." Several dioceses have appointed laypeople as chancellors and directors of ongoing clergy formation. There are myriad options for lay people to support and carry forth a community's mission. There will also be members who struggle with a loss of control of ministries and say the community is "being taken over by lay people." We do not agree. These steps are authentic responses to the signs of the times for many religious communities.

None of the paths in this section are a transformation or a refounding. But they can bring new energy and hope.

## 7. DEATH AND LEAVING A LEGACY

Some congregations explore all options and make the decision to continue as they have been. They may not

have had a vocation or new transferred member in twenty or thirty years and feel that it is unfair to bring anyone new into the community. Some continue to hope that new members will still come but determine that being faithful to whom and what they are is the best option even if it means the eventual death of the congregation.

Over the years numerous organizations, both religious and secular, have ceased to exist. However, they leave a powerful legacy that survives the last members. The Shaker communities of the United States are but one group whose legacy of simplicity and community has continued decades after most members have died. The research of Walsh and Glynn of Boston College has identified numerous organizations that leave a legacy that endures even after the organization ceases to exist. This expansion of one's identity does not happen by chance but by a structured attempt by members and leaders to leave a storied past of positive attributes that can still inspire others into the future.

This legacy grows out of the authentic gift that the organization has given to the world and the church. For example, a group of religious women, whose charism is walking with peoples at the margins of society, recommitted





themselves to that focus in practical ways. Each sister made a pledge that she would intentionally be with people on the margins, if not in her full-time ministry then certainly in her voluntary ministry. They contacted all the agencies in their geographic area that ministered to people at the margins to articulate their commitment and find ways to collaborate with these various agencies. They invited their associates to make a similar pledge and work with them. They developed a reputation for helping. Their legacy continues to grow despite the diminishment of their numbers.

Other groups have incorporated their assets and resources into trusts that reflect their corporate values, such as endowing a women's shelter or preserving land for ecological conservation. Others are entering into partnerships for the development of their properties into low-income housing or care facilities. These partnerships are with other faiths, religious communities or public entities. Their legacy will keep their resources working for the common good into the future.

We all believe that life does not end with death. New life is our reward. So it is with our religious congregations. There is a significant difference between choosing an option for the future and one being chosen for you. Even this last option of legacy needs careful planning for the administration of resources, care for elderly members and leadership alternatives to carry out a congregation's specified legacy.

## CONCLUSION

There is no one authentic path available for religious congregations facing today's challenges. Each of these seven paths is a valid and useful option. The central question is "What is our community's authentic response to our current situation in the light of our charism?" Each path will require difficult decisions and the embracing of the paschal mystery. What has to die in order to give new life? Doing nothing in itself is an option by default.

Realistic dialogue and planning does make a difference in that it allows a community to review the available

options and discern its path forward. Even so, these processes provide no guarantee. A group might venture down one path only to find they need to opt for another path.

So where should a community begin? The key needs are leadership, honesty and dialogue. Leaders need to honestly assess the reality of their congregation and find ways to engage members in a constructive dialogue about it. The reality needs to include resources, personnel projections, care of the elderly, local community size, future leaders and ministerial commitments. This requires making real and at times difficult choices. Important steps in the process include:

- Communicate with members in a manner that is realistic without creating fear.
- Assist members in awakening to the multiple levels of change and transition that need to be psychologically and spiritually embraced.
- Engage members in a dialogue about the options available that may reframe the path into the future.
- Plan for long-range and short-range viability with regard to personnel, finances and resources.
- Identify which members of the community are available for leadership, formation and ministry.

We believe this is a time of great possibilities for religious communities and one filled with many options—for those communities willing to explore them.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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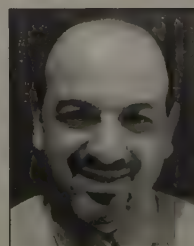
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Ann Garrido, D.Min.

# Embracing Discord

## Preparing Ministers for Healthy Conflict





As a child, one of my favorite sections of the Bible was the opening of the book of Acts. I loved hearing the story about the thousands of people drawn in by the preaching of the apostles, who handed their possessions over to the nascent Christian community, and lived “happily ever after.” Hearing my father speak of his struggles in the business world, I considered how ideal it would be to work in the church with people motivated only by good and holy intentions in an environment void of conflict—the church as painted in the book of Acts.

My first high school job as evening parish receptionist was quite an eye-opening experience as I watched four priests of varying generations and ecclesiologies wrangle with one another and a strong-willed housekeeper to exercise pastoral leadership in a bustling, boisterous Catholic community. It turns out that sometimes keys get lost, the gym gets double-booked, sisters yell, priests cuss and no one remembers to empty the dishwasher. Not everyday, but enough to leave an impression: the Catholic Church is

not a place where people live “happily ever after.”

One of the great gifts of graduate studies in theology was the opportunity to discover the letters of Paul. Written decades before the Gospels and the book of Acts were put onto parchment, Paul’s epistles reveal a church riddled with discord even from its earliest days. Only a few years after the tomb was found empty, Jesus’ disciples were already debating how to handle money, what kinds of public behaviors were appropriate for Christians, and what to



do about economic disparity in their midst. They had differing views on the role of women, how to handle interreligious marriage, and wages for their ministers. Many of the challenges that we know today, they knew as well. It turns out that there was never a time in which the church was without conflict, and yet, two thousand years later, the church goes on.

The story I tell of my own journey is not unique. It mirrors the journey of almost every minister in the Church—a pattern of attraction and disillusionment, hope and coming to terms with reality. What distinguishes ministers who are able to live meaningfully within the church as it is from those frustrated in their attempts to live “happily ever after” is the ability to live and function within a church in discord. Indeed, I would argue that the single most determinative factor in whether or not a religious, priest, or lay minister fresh from studies will thrive or flail in their early years of ministry has to do with their comfort, capacity and skill-level surrounding conflict.

Given the prominent place that conflict plays in ministerial success, it makes sense that ministerial formation programs will want to consider how they can prepare candidates well for the realities of life lived in communion with others. In this essay, I want to introduce four components of a holistic model for conflict education and suggest possible means for integrating these components into a formation program.

#### ARTICULATE A HEALTHY, POSITIVE THEOLOGY OF CONFLICT FROM THE START

Often, the most foundational shift any ministry candidate has to make toward a healthy relationship with conflict is a paradigmatic one. Conflict, in much of Christian thought, is understood as a consequence of sin: God had intended for the world to live in harmony but sin caused discord.

As a result, Christians tend to see the presence of conflict in their community as a sign of sin, a sign that something has gone terribly wrong and needs fixing. Because sin is by definition a chosen evil—something we could have resisted but did not—it implies that some party must be to blame for the conflict.

Many persons drawn into ministry hold this understanding of conflict. Because they have committed themselves vocationally to strive for holiness, it is important to them to separate themselves from sin and, hence, from conflict. For those who tend to absorb responsibility in any given situation, the presence of conflict will set off internal triggers, “What did I do wrong? I must not be a very good person or this would not be happening.” For those who have a propensity to shift responsibility, the presence of conflict will set off another set of questions, “Who is to blame? How can we clarify what went wrong here and call those at fault back to the right path?”

The Christian tradition, however, can offer a wider, more nuanced theology of conflict. While sin certainly escalates much of the conflict in our world—raising it to the level of violence, bitterness and even war—the roots of conflict seem inherently structured into the design of creation itself. God created the world with a tremendous amount of diversity, and indeed, seems to glory in it. Diversity implies not just diversity of species and skin color, but also diversity of cultures, opinions and perspectives. Exposure to diversity, with its resulting experience of discomfort, surprise and disagreement, appears to be the way that God grows creation, bringing it forward toward the Parousia.

Conflict in scripture is not synonymous with an absence of divine presence. Jesus’ disciples argued with one another, even as he was in their midst. In his teaching, he indicates that his followers would continue to have problems amongst themselves and gave them strong advice about forgiveness and talking to one another face-to-face before talking to others about the matter. Conflict is simply a part of life as a Christian; the more significant issue is how to respond constructively to it.

Studies of Christian communities indicate that those reporting little or no conflict are more likely comatose than models of robust discipleship. People only argue about issues they find important; communities want members who feel passionately about their mission and vision. Psychologist John Gottman’s parallel research on healthy marriages discovered that couples that had one negative encounter per every five positive encounters experienced the most

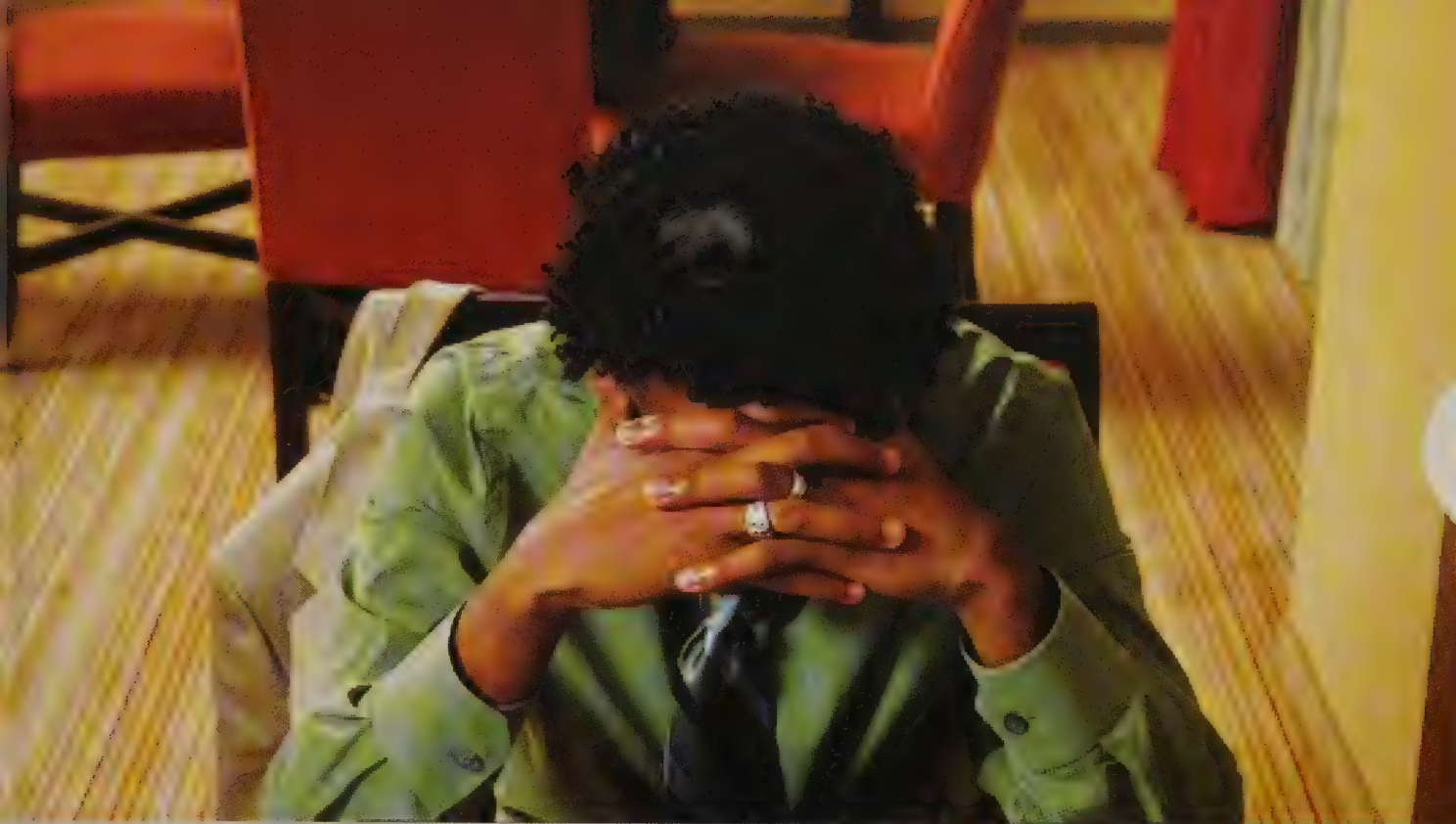
stable, enduring marriages. More negativity placed couples at a greater risk of divorce, but curiously, less negativity often indicated an even greater risk. Couples who reported very little conflict often had opted out of the relationship emotionally and mentally.

Ministry formation programs will want to establish a “theology of conflict” to undergird their efforts. Alongside the articulated mission and outcome statements for the ministry program should be an intentional statement about how conflict will be understood in the formation process. In the ministry program I oversee, we have taken to having the students read a text on difficult conversations as part of the orientation to the program. “We are going to be spending a lot of time with each other as a group over the next four years,” I say. “And we’re going to be talking about things about which we feel very deeply. It is inevitable that at some time in the coming years we are going to disagree with each other, hurt one another, irritate one another. It would be very sad if we never admitted such things, because we would have missed a great opportunity for growth. So, before we ever have the chance to disagree, let’s think about how we want to handle conflict when it happens.” Giving candidates vocabulary and tools for conflict before they need them is easier than introducing them in the midst of a conflict. It lets them know conflict is normal; it is part of the spiritual journey rather than foreign to it; and, we have ways of transforming it for the sake of growth in holiness.

#### Exercises

- Have each candidate write a story about a conflict he witnessed in his own family as a child and the lesson about conflict he took away from it. Explore within the formation community how our experiences of conflict in family have shaped differing perspectives on the meaning and value of conflict. Is it to be avoided or welcomed? Can relationships survive conflict or does it inevitably end them? Is it possible conflict can deepen a relationship?
- Have members of the formation community create a





“Conflict Charter” at the beginning of their time with one another in which they decide on guidelines for how they want to handle disagreements with one another in the future. To what are they willing to hold themselves accountable in times of discord?

#### CULTIVATE CAPACITIES NEEDED TO REMAIN IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Few people upon finding themselves in the midst of a conflict think, “Oh, excellent, I have been awaiting just such a growth opportunity!” Rather, most find conflict a very uncomfortable state in which to dwell and express their discomfort in a variety of ways ranging from total avoidance of the neuralgic topic to wanting immediate conversation and resolution. One of the greatest helps we can offer ministry candidates in our programs is to cultivate the capacities needed to remain within the conflict without ignoring or rushing it.

The choice of the term “capacity” is intentional. Often, conflict management is taught as a set of quaint phrases or techniques to be employed in times of disagreement (e.g. “Use ‘I feel’ state-

ments.”) But, unless these phrases and techniques are undergirded by a set of attitudes, they bear little fruit, and indeed become the source of ridicule. Healthy conflict requires not just a change of language but also a real conversion of mind. Capacities required for healthy conflict include:

— *Curiosity:* While rarely listed as a virtue, curiosity is perhaps one of the most important habits to be cultivated in the spiritual life. Without curiosity, a person is unable to learn or to change, for without curiosity, a person lacks the inner fire that drives the desire to understand more. In a difficult conversation, the person without curiosity assumes she already understands the situation at hand and already knows where she stands. On the other hand, the person who is able to remain curious, even in conflict, has the capacity to turn the conversation into a learning conversation in which new insight can be gleaned, including information about how the other perceives the matter and how the other feels. The curious person can remain open enough to receive additional data that might change how she looks at the situation.

— *Sense of Self-Worth:* A solid sense of self-worth implies knowledge of oneself—both one’s strengths and one’s

shortcomings. It also implies an acceptance and love of self, even if not perfect. A sense of self-worth makes it possible for persons to receive new information, even feedback about their own role in the situation, becoming neither defensive nor defeated. Persons possessing a sense of self-worth know themselves well enough to realize that they likely did contribute something to the conflict. At the same time, they know that their perspective is still worth sharing. Difficult conversations done well require curious listening, but they also require assertion. Without a sense of self-worth, persons have a hard time valuing their own dignity and inserting their own voice into the conversation.

— *Comfort with Emotions:* A common misconception about conflict assumes that conflicts are best solved when people “stick to the facts” and “leave personal feelings out of the matter.” In reality, the conversation would not be a difficult conversation if feelings were not involved, and rather than ignore their role in the conflict, it would be better to bring them out into the open. Willingness to address emotions, however, implies the capacity to first be aware of emotions, to name them and to accept their presence. For ministry candidates, this can be particularly difficult.



*We can be intentional about constructing a formation environment in which wondering aloud is encouraged, questions honored, emotions taken seriously and each person encouraged to speak.*

Many have been socialized to believe that certain emotions—especially those emotions most commonly present in conflict such as anger, impatience and frustration—are unholy. And, again, if one's pursuit of a ministerial vocation is part of a larger quest for holiness, the presence of these emotions seems contradictory to one's vocation. The person who is able to acknowledge his or her own feelings, and to distinguish having these feelings from acting on them, will be able to better acknowledge and receive the expression of others' emotions as well.

Capacities, unlike skills, are generally easier "caught" than "taught." Lectures on curiosity or self worth are likely to do little toward the overall outcomes of our formation programs. But, we can be intentional about constructing a formation environment in which wondering aloud is encouraged, questions honored, emotions taken seriously and each person encouraged to speak. Although these practices are not exclusively conflict practices, they nurture the capacities that will be needed in times of conflict.

#### *Exercises*

- Ask candidates to bring to mind a time when they were really angry with another person and to roll through the entire episode in their imagination. Then ask them to write an account of the event from the point of view of the person with whom they were so angry. Explore the candidates' reactions to the writing exercise. What parts of the story did they begin to realize they did not know? About what did they become curious in the course of writing?
- In pairs, have one person tell the story of a significant event in his life, pausing every thirty seconds. During the pause the other person simply names the feelings he heard radiating from the storyteller. The storyteller is free to acknowledge or nuance with greater accuracy the feelings before going on with the story.

#### INTRODUCE SKILLS FOR MOVING BEYOND CONFLICT

Being able to remain in conflict is important, yet no one wishes to set up a permanent abode there. Capacities for conflict must be complemented by skills that enable one to move beyond the conflict. Specific skills can be taught and should be integrated into the curriculum of a formation program, including:

*Listening Skills:* Many ministry candidates genuinely care for others and want to listen deeply to them, but have a difficult time conveying what they intend. They are curious, but they aren't able to communicate effectively their interest. Simple techniques like good eye contact, leaning in toward the person speaking and non-verbal acknowledgements like nodding are easy to develop. They can make a real difference in ordinary conversation, and even more so in difficult conversation. Candidates should also be introduced to rudimentary practices associated with active listening (e.g. ability to paraphrase what the other has said or attentive silence). If these are practiced outside of real-life conflict, they can become second nature in the midst of actual conflict, allowing the other party to feel better heard.

*Problem Solving Approaches:* Often conflicts seem irresolvable because the parties are each locked into their respective positions and see the other party as the problem. Progress, however, can be made when we separate the problem from the opposing party and view the opposing party as a potential ally in solving a shared problem. The question then becomes: How can we work through this together? What are some creative options? Are there other possibilities to meet our respective interests beyond the positions with which we came? Frequently opposing parties share many of the same interests, but merely hold differing opinions about the best way of realizing those interests. Candidates benefit tremendously from learning the difference between positions and interests, as well as strategies for creating new options.

*Conflict Discernment Skills:* Triangulation features prominently in many ministerial conflicts. Persons often prefer to talk about the conflict with others rather than directly to the person with whom they have the prob-



lem. They also may find themselves wrapped into conflicts which are not really their own, but rather a fellow community member's. As a result, many ministry settings become toxic with misdirected frustration that hangs in the environment like an intangible fog. As one of my colleagues once advised me about my own proclivities in this direction, "You want your anger to be a like a coursing river rather than a finely diffused mist." Ministry candidates benefit from a mental rubric they can run through in considering a conflict to help them decide whether or not they should initiate a conversation, and, if so, with whom and toward what end. I have found the handouts from Triad Consulting Group (available at <http://diffcon.com/HelpYourself>) to be especially useful in assisting candidates to think through a potential conversation before it happens. Frequently in the process, a candidate will realize that the conflict is predominantly within him and that the difficult conversation is an internal one. By changing one's own contribution to the situation, the dynamic can automatically shift.

#### Exercises

- Ask each candidate to call to mind a "hot button" political or ecclesial issue about which she has strong feelings. Then have each candidate choose a partner in the group who could argue the other side of the issue. Have this partner try to persuade the candidate of the opposing position. The candidate's role is to try to engage her active listening skills in the conversation, even as she hears a position with which she disagrees. She is to attempt to restate accurately what the other person is saying and to ask open-ended, curious questions, while conveying with her posture and eyes that she wants to understand the other better.
- Using either a prepared case study (or a story of conflict shared by one of the candidates), have the formation group identify the two opposing positions present in the case on the far corners of a blackboard. Then list what each party's interests are underneath

its position. Finally, in the middle of the board, brainstorm other ways that the parties' interests might be met beyond their positions.

#### MODEL A COMMUNITY MADE STRONGER BY ITS CONFLICTS

It seems obvious: formation communities that want emerging ministers to develop healthy conflict practices should model those practices themselves in community. People learn how to do conflict well by seeing conflict done well. They overcome their fears about conflict fracturing a community by experiencing a community that repeatedly not only survives conflict, but grows stronger through it.

Equally obvious: this is much easier said than done.

As a formation team, it is useful to periodically review: Are we modeling the behavior we espouse? Are we aware of the way our life with one another is formative, distinct from whatever our planned curriculum might be? If the ministry candidates were to absorb our preferred way of dealing with conflict, what would they be taking away with them?

The formation community is a place for candidates to try out new approaches to conflict and test new ways of responding. Some of these are going to feel awkward and unnatural at first. Occasionally there will be grand failures. So, the team will also want to ask itself: Is this environment a safe place to make mistakes? Can we be encouraging of those who are trying to let go of old patterns of behavior, but have not yet arrived at something new?

#### Exercises

- Invite pairs of religious, married couples, or ministry staff to tell the story of a time in their life with one another when conflict done well strengthened their relationship rather than ended it. What enabled the conflict to be a positive experience in the long haul rather than negative? What did they learn from the experience that they still rely on now in conflict?
- When a conflict arises in the formation community, treat it

as an opportunity for learning and practicing good conflict skills. Take time for each person to prepare for the discussion using some of the discernment tools described above. Before the discussion recall together the listening and problem solving skills that have been part of the learning during the year. Afterwards, process together, "What did we do well here? What really seemed to work? What did we not do well in addressing this conflict together? Where do we need more work?"

#### CONCLUSIONS

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' final dinner with the ministers he had been forming was marked by a long closing discourse in which he relayed all that he most wanted them to remember before he departed. At the center of his teaching that night was a parable in which he described himself as the True Vine and his disciples as the branches. Repeatedly, he used one verb to express what he wanted them to be able to do in the time ahead, difficult though it may be: he wanted them to "remain."

Intentional, holistic preparation for dealing with the perennial conflicts of church life is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer new ministers in our formation programs. For, when we nurture the vision, capacities and skills for conflict done well, we are proffering a pathway for "remaining" in the ministry and in the Vine. We are giving the means for living not a life "happily ever after" but life "in abundance," the life Jesus does promise us, even in the midst of our bustling, boisterous communities.



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# Dynamics of Transfo

I have yet to come across a business, religious community or parish that is not interested in transformation. That is to say, I have never heard leaders or members of an organization say, "You know, we'd like things around here to stay pretty much the way they are," nor have I heard a newly appointed leader say, "I commit to you today that my presidency will be marked by a vigilant maintenance of the status quo." Leaders inevitably cast their organizational vision in terms of some type of transformation, whether they are responding to rapidly changing social, political and economic realities or proactively committing to a new future. What constitutes a truly transformational leader and what enables a leader to facilitate genuine organizational transformation are less apparent, however, than the desire or presumption of change. Even rarer in organizations that desire transformation is awareness of the dynamic interplay among three dimensions of transformation: 1) transformational goals and outcomes, 2) competencies for leading transformation and 3) ongoing personal transformation. Transformational leadership depends on the interrelated



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# International Leadership







dynamics of vision, action and being—one compelling the next in a continuing spiral that reveals the spiritual path of transformational leadership.

#### TRANSFORMATIONAL VISION

Transformational leadership depends on a vision that is genuinely transformational. While this may seem obvious, casting a transformational vision is not easy. Most of what is done in the name of transformation in organizations is about change, and often it is merely incremental change, not bold or innovative change that marks transformation. James MacGregor Burns, who coined the term transformational leadership in 1978, makes a sharp distinction between change and transformation:

To change is to substitute one thing for another, to give and take, to exchange places . . . but to transform . . . is to cause a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in the very condition or nature of a thing, a change into another substance, a radical change in outward form and inward character, as when a frog is transformed into a prince or a carriage maker into an auto factory.<sup>1</sup>

Some communities and organizations that recognize the need for transformation struggle to name transformational outcomes because that task requires both vision and imagination. The first challenge of articulating a transformational vision is to see beyond what is currently visible. The ingredients of a transformational vision include both a picture of what could be and trust in what can be neither seen nor predicted. Transformational leaders face the paradox of creating a vision that they are simultaneously being given; that is, simultaneously taking action and surrendering. Innovation expert Soren Kaplan calls this process “harnessing the power of surprise,” which allows organizations to break through to entirely new realities.<sup>2</sup>

Leaders who are able to speak from the creative tension of that paradox face a second challenge: motivating and engaging their employees or community members to co-create a new reality from a vision that is at best only partially in focus. Consider some examples of transformational visions: the religious congregation that sets out to redefine what its sponsorship of institutions will mean; the school that commits to an increasingly impoverished neighbor-

hood; the healthcare system that envisions 100 percent access to care in each community it serves. In each case intent is clear, but the vision is ill-defined. How could such obscure visions ever come to fruition? As perplexing as that question may be, it is not the fog around the vision that most troubles organizations. It is the risk involved in letting go of what is currently seen, known and secure—the necessary path to transformation. Leaders who can articulate a transformational vision are leaders that have been captured by those visions. Even in their ill-defined form, transformational visions are powerful enough to compel leaders to develop the competencies needed to enable their organizations to create a new reality together. Vision compels action.

#### COMPETENCIES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Burns distinguishes transformational leadership from a persistent mode of “transactional leadership” in which the leader is primarily negotiating an exchange of something valued by the follower for something—an action or service—that the leader desires. His



examples are fairly obvious: a paycheck for work; political promises for votes.<sup>3</sup> The competencies associated with transactional leadership have to do with navigating organizational politics, negotiation and maintaining structures and positions, and they include making operational decisions, driving for results, developing teams, delegation, planning/finance, monitoring and influencing through incentives.<sup>4</sup> “Transformational leadership, while more complex, is more potent.”<sup>5</sup> The competencies needed for transformational leadership are relational and person-centered: inspiration, contextual analysis, strategic agility, innovation and developing and empowering others. One must demonstrate these competencies by exercising superior skills in collaboration and communication including holding difficult conversations, facing confrontations and managing conflict.

The shift from transactional to transformational leadership involves a significantly different set of competencies to consider, but in both cases there are clear competencies. Considering leadership through the lens of competencies is the arena in which corporations tend to be most comfortable. Competencies that can be observed and measured are staples of leadership development, and often leadership development in businesses is focused on building and assessing skills. The massive resource titled *FYI-For Your Improvement* produced by Lominger International, which features “67 Leadership Architect® Competencies, 19 Career Stallers and Stoppers and 7 Global Focus Areas,”<sup>6</sup> is a great example of a competency-based development focus.

The reality that there are specific competencies for leadership at all has a significant implication for many organizations and for leaders who seek transformation. While many businesses devote significant resources to develop senior leaders and to provide opportunities for new leaders to explore their strengths and areas for growth as they develop competencies, many other organizations—that need and want excellence in transformational leader-

ship—do not. Leaders of religious communities, churches, schools and social agencies often have received little guidance in developing the skills and competencies for leadership, even as they are navigating tremendous changes or opportunities facing their organizations. The abundant examples are almost clichés: the excellent teacher who becomes president or headmaster with no administrative experience; the rotating responsibility for serving as provincial among community members with no leadership training; the appointments of pastors from a limited pool of priests in which competencies for presiding and pastoral care may far outweigh skills for leadership. Leaders who do not have the opportunity to explore, test and develop essential skills for leadership cannot become truly transformational leaders.

Recent business literature as well as leadership development workshops and programs abound with resources to develop all of the competencies named above. Leaders who desire to effect transformational change will be able to fulfill that desire only if they realize the competencies that are demanded and take steps to build those skills. The importance of building competencies cannot be overstated. Too often leaders of faith-based and not-for-profit organizations, who have a genuinely transformational vision, are unable to make a difference because they have failed to recognize, admit or seek out needed skills. Leaders who do not have formal preparation for leadership, and who are in organizations that do not have development programs in place, need to seek out ways to assess, learn, practice and hone their skills. A good starting point for any leader is a simple leadership assessment survey completed by one’s supervisor, colleagues, employees whom one supervises, board members and other stakeholders.

#### ATTENDING TO BEING

Behavior-based skill development is necessary, but not sufficient, to form transformational leaders. The impact of transformational leadership described by multiple authors reflects a more

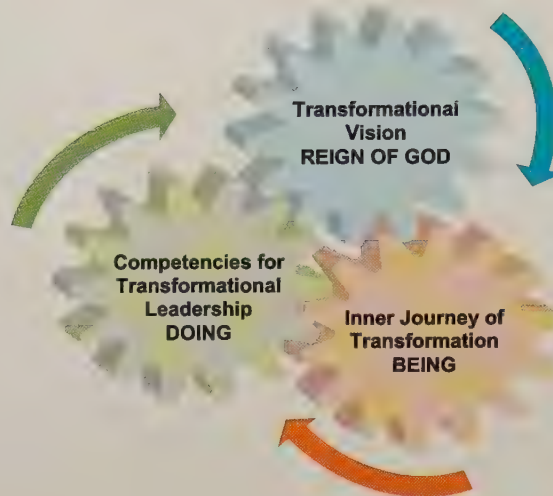
*The competencies needed for transformational leadership are relational and person-centered: inspiration, contextual analysis, strategic agility, innovation and developing and empowering others.*



INNER DISPOSITIONS FOR SERVICE AND VIRTUE FUEL AND ARE REFINED BY SPECIFIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

- Inspiring
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Conflict Management
- Contextual Analysis
- Innovation
- Strategic Agility
- Developing others

## DOING



DEVELOPING A NEW IMAGINATION AND POSSIBILITY FOR ONE'S ORGANIZATION THAT IS FURTHER EXPANDED BY CONNECTION TO THE VISION OF GOD'S REIGN

- Magnanimity—imagining bold and noble outcomes
- Preserving Human Dignity
- Advancing the Common Good

## VISION

COOPERATING WITH THE ACTION OF GOD IN US TO DEEPEN PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY AND INTEGRITY, AND CULTIVATING SPECIFIC DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY FOR LEADERSHIP

- Connectedness
- Attitude of servant
- Virtue as second nature
- Living out of communion

## BEING

*Engaging in ongoing personal and communal reflection on one's leadership practice drives the dynamic of transformational leadership: Vision compels action; Reflecting on actions illuminates aspects of our being; Reflecting on virtues and dispositions needed to fuel transformation illuminates the Spirit as power for transformation and source of our Vision.*

inward focus than most leadership development programs allow: transformational leaders appeal to values and aspirations shared by both followers and leaders, resulting in greater impact on followers and higher motivation overall.<sup>7</sup> Transformational leadership “elevates the follower’s level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of others, the organization and society.”<sup>8</sup> “The essence of transformational leadership is the inspiration and moral uplifting of followers . . . [involving] deep change in followers’ values, attitudes and behaviors.”<sup>9</sup> Transformational leadership “is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents.”<sup>10</sup>

In spite of the necessary work to build stronger competencies for leadership, one’s attitudes, dispositions and character will also always show up in one’s leadership. Skills for collaboration and strategic agility can be undermined

by a hidden need for control. Attempts at creative innovation can be thwarted by an unexamined fear of failure. The capacity to engage conflict is not a necessary outcome of learning the skills for managing conflict; it demands honest and thoughtful reflection on how willing one is to engage conflict. The feelings that may be triggered when one receives feedback call for a look inside, and the thrill that may accompany bold vision cannot be manifest as Servant Leadership without attention to one’s virtue and character. Even resistance may be an indicator of one’s need to look inward; imagining that one does not need training or leadership development to function well in a leadership role, for example, is a type of hubris that cannot be cured without reflection on one’s fears and motivations.

New skills may result in changed behavior, but changed behavior cannot be sustained without inner transformation. The distinction noted above between organizational change and transformation holds for persons as well.

There is a difference between change and transformation. “Change is when something old dies and something new begins. . . . But mere change might or might not be accompanied by authentic inner transformation. If change does not include personal transformation, we do not actually grow, we just grudgingly adjust.”<sup>1</sup>

As leaders come to understand the nature of the competencies required for transformational leadership, they can sense the need for a deeper preparation. Skills of inspiring, analyzing context, strategizing, innovating, empowering others, communicating, collaborating and managing conflict will all limp if not carried out with humility, faith, hope and love. They are best fueled by the power of prudence, justice, courage and temperance. Transformational leadership requires leaders to be transformed from the inside out.



Some leaders, especially in faith-based organizations, may be familiar with the spiritual path of building character and attending to being. For other leaders that path of inner transformation may be uncharted territory. Neither group is likely to be familiar with practices that integrate competency development and the cultivation of virtues for transformational leadership. Three simple elements can build a practice that facilitates inner transformation:

- intentional and ongoing reflection on one's leadership actions,
- a community of inquiry and support, in which members help each other to see and explore the dispositions that are motivating the actions and that are expressed in the actions, and
- individual commitment to spiritual practices—prayer, meditation, mindfulness, solidarity with those who suffer—that increase awareness and vulnerability.

Spiritual traditions across the globe affirm consistent fruits in those who regularly engage that practice of reflection: deeper capacity to make meaningful connections, awareness of the communion one shares with other humans and all creation, capacity to be other-centered in vision and in service and virtue as "second-nature." The path of personal transformation enables leaders to come face to face with their shadows, vices and destructive dispositions that will, if not addressed, impede their leadership. They become open to their own need for transformation, the awareness of which is itself the mechanism of transformation. Gazing in that mirror, leaders are enabled to access, nurture and embrace more fully the inner core of virtue and character that fuels their actions as transformational leaders. As leaders reflectively explore their actions in community, their journey echoes the path to a transformational vision: risking surrender of what is seen, known and secure to embrace what lies in shadow, and trusting a vision—a promised possibility.

## THE SPIRAL WIDENS AND DEEPENS

The path of openness and vulnerability that enables true reflection on one's inner life leads inevitably to encounter with the Source of all Being—the divine spirit creating and being expressed in the human spirit. On the inner journey as persons-in-community, leaders meet the Spirit of God already at work transforming them in being and action, and they discover that the Spirit is the source of their power for transformation and their power for leadership. They meet the Spirit of God already at work transforming their organizations and the world, and they discover that the Spirit is the source of a vision of transformation that orders one's leadership toward service of human dignity and the common good. Genuinely transformational leaders are co-creators of God's Reign.

As leaders come to recognize the Reign of God as the horizon of their transformational vision they can imagine broader transformational possibilities for the communities and organizations they lead. Their expanded vision compels bolder and more faithful actions that demand deeper levels of leadership competency, which in turn compel a deeper personal transformation—until, at last, God shall be all in all.

## ENDNOTES

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Joanne Schuster, S.F.P., Ph.D.

# Quantum Leadership of Religious Congregations:

*A Model for Interesting Times*





I was sitting at my table at the Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR) meeting in summer 2012, watching interactions among the members—small groups and the group as a whole—when I experienced a tiny epiphany. Organizations are surprisingly complex structures that function as living, non-linear, dynamic systems (Gaciu 2010)! In fact, they illustrate quantum principles that generally do not lend themselves to observable phenomena, but this recent LCWR meeting was actually a living, breathing illustration of quantum theory.

Today's religious congregations no longer see themselves as simply obedient agents of the hierarchical church. Rather, they see themselves as interconnected parts of the whole

church: an interconnection of hierarchy, priests, vowed religious and church members, all of whom form a morphogenic field—an invisible, intangible, inaudible, tasteless and odorless connection (Sheldrake 2005). As Pat Farrell, O.S.F., president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious said in her keynote address:

In the context of Barbara Marx Hubbard's presentation, it is easy to see this LCWR moment as a microcosm of a world in flux. It is nested within the very large and comprehensive paradigm shift of our day. The cosmic breaking down and breaking through we are experiencing gives us a broader context. Many institutions, traditions, and structures seem to be with-





ering. Why? I believe the philosophical underpinnings of the way we've organized reality no longer hold. The human family is not served by individualism, patriarchy, a scarcity mentality, or competition. The world is outgrowing the dualistic constructs of superior/inferior, win/lose, good/bad, and domination/submission. Breaking through in their place are equality, communion, collaboration, synchronicity, expansiveness, abundance, wholeness, mutuality, intuitive knowing, and love. This shift, while painful, is good news! It heralds a hopeful future for our Church and our world (Farrell 2012).

Traditional management theorists see groups as systems through which goals are accomplished and as such, they trend toward hierarchy. Contrary to this theory, the quantum approach sees both the Congregation as a field and its members as interconnected energetic beings, enhanced by collaboration and interaction. These connections are non-linear and non-hierarchical. There is constant interplay between micro and macro levels—interactions that result in self-organizing systems that are constantly creating a new state of equilibrium (Griffin and Shaw 2000). The newer sciences, like quantum physics, employ this new way of thinking, using a different set of metaphors than traditional sciences. In contrast to the traditional understanding, the quantum paradigm holds that nothing is fixed, events are not predictable, control is an illusion and change is continuous. The traditional approach focuses on the parts of a whole: its central thesis is that systems tend to move toward order and stability (homeostasis), with disorder kept at bay by clearly defining boundaries and roles. In traditional models, change occurs through redefinition of boundaries and roles.

In the quantum paradigm, the most basic units (members) are the whole. They are both separate from as well as connect-

ed to each other. The decision-making process at the LCWR, where 900 elected leaders of religious congregations democratically decided, in two days, how they would respond to the Vatican's doctrinal assessment, was a clear and present example of the quantum paradigm in action. The LCWR came to its decision by drawing on the collective wisdom of the group: small group members spoke their truth (all were seated at tables of eight), with the LCWR leadership supporting the process until the group members charged the LCWR Board to conduct a conversation with Archbishop Sartain from a stance of mutual respect, careful listening and open dialogue. The expectation of the LCWR members is that open and honest dialogue may lead not only to increasing understanding between the church leadership and women religious, but also to creating more possibilities for the laity, particularly women, to have a voice in the church. Furthermore, the assembly instructed the board to articulate its belief that religious life, as it is lived by the women religious who comprise LCWR, is an authentic expression of religious life that must not be compromised (LCWR Press Release, August 13, 2012).

Note that the members gave direction to their elected representatives who were charged to carry out the decisions.

Because the quantum perspective acknowledges the "separateness" of individual members, members can be pinned down in space and time—an area in which the traditional approach works well—but the quantum paradigm also recognizes the interconnectedness of all members' collective dynamic energy, expanding the "potential" through which members are inextricably linked with all other members who, in turn, have their own particular dynamic energy and potentials. Because the quantum paradigm emphasizes relationships and integration, it is dynamic rather than static, holistic rather than hierarchical.



Traditional leadership paradigms emphasize delimiting roles and controlling boundaries. Causality is linear; that is, an organization's internal dynamic affects members, but only leaders are seen as affecting the internal dynamic. The quantum perspective, on the other hand, emphasizes free-flowing interaction and codetermination. That is, members influence the internal dynamic as much as the internal dynamic influences the members. All organizations consist of a world of connections, interactions, relationships and forces—they are not fixed entities at all! The quantum perspective elucidates the intricate interplay among all and acknowledges that the only meaningful change comes from within, and occurs first among various members. Some differences between the traditional concepts of leadership and a newer form (Quantum Leadership)—one that has become common in the LCWR and many of its member Congregations—are outlined in the table below.

### TRADITIONAL VERSUS QUANTUM LEADERSHIP

#### Dimensions of Traditional Leadership:

**Leadership determines structure and form in advance—all is pre-organized**

- Sharing information on a need-to-know basis (members are followers to be protected from too much knowledge)
- Providing clear, concise top-down communication
- Specifying the nature, purpose and terms of relationship among members
- Expecting obedience and conformity to existing forms
- Supporting a clear, stable organizational structure, with clearly delimited roles and boundaries

#### Working with defined objectives, forms and rules

- Dealing with day-to-day events in terms of conformity to pre-ordained roles and rules
- Striving to preserve time-honored structures and forms
- Supporting the view that change initiates from the top in terms of defined strategic objectives and plans
- Initiating change through redefinition of boundaries and roles

#### Insisting that fundamental imperatives flow from and through hierarchical structures

- Accepting the inevitability of existing hierarchical models and structures
- Supporting unquestioning belief in the one, true Magisterium
- Watching for and correcting any variances from established models
- Articulating clearly the place and purpose of the church, the Congregations, and each member

#### Dimensions of Quantum Leadership:

**Leadership goes with the “flow” of the group, encouraging the tendency to self-organize**

- Facilitating the free flow of information
- Facilitating the development of member communication to leadership
- Focusing on nourishing and sustaining relationships among members
- Encouraging members and earning trust
- Supporting fractal organizations: individual members act independently, with their behavior bounded by shared charisma, vision and values

#### Working with uncertainty and ambiguity

- Striving to see day-to-day events in terms of the big picture, the “tides” in events
- Providing creativity and mutual support
- Supporting the view that change ultimately is centered in congregational members, as well as leadership
- Initiating change from and through the bottom to the top, the inside to the outside

#### Recognizing that fundamental imperatives flow from interactions among members

- Emphasizing the importance of clarifying and sharing ways of living out the charisma and Gospel values
- Supporting a belief in the validity of a plurality of values and perspectives
- Listening and watching for indicators of changing ways of living the Gospel values
- Articulating visions of “what could be” through modeling Gospel values

### LEADERSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

Certainly spirituality and spiritual development have always been integral parts of religious life within the Roman Catholic tradition. In recent years, however, discussions of spirituality often revert to the literal meaning of spirituality—(*spiritus*) meaning “that which gives life” and distinguish it from religion (*religio*) which means “to link back” and refers to the tradition through which we have learned to access the spiritual. This has led to study and exploration of other traditions which also help people to access that which “gives them life.” Ashmos and Duchon (2000) discuss spirituality in terms of an individual's sense of self, sense of mission and purpose in life and the personal meaning work has for the individual. For our purposes, it is important only to re-emphasize that values, meaningfulness, purpose, authenticity and wholeness are fundamental to an individual's personhood or being. People believe they have a certain worth. When others ignore this (treat them as though they are less worthy), they are wounded. Furthermore, when people fail to live up to their own sense of worth, they feel shame. For these reasons, among others, quantum leaders are available to accompany each member of the group on her/his spiritual journey, rather than prescribing a predetermined pathway.



Under the old paradigm, leaders encouraged members to develop individual attributes that related specifically to their shared charism. This is desirable, of course, because then members will align with the congregational founder's goal more effectively. However, congregational leaders today strive to encourage expression and development of both the congregation's and the member's personal way of living the charism. Among other things, this contributes to each member's sense of being valued and accepted as a whole person. He or she is not merely seen as an interchangeable player on a large checkerboard. Quantum leaders also cultivate their own inner light and individual potential while, at the same time, remaining aware that effective leaders draw insight and inspiration from the qualities of the group they lead. The fundamental requirements of quantum leadership include: acting with moral purpose to make a positive difference in the lives of members and society as a whole; building relationships that nurture both individuals and the congregation; making informed decisions through listening and observation, and acquiring knowledge through sharing with other leaders and the members.

The traditional style of leadership acknowledges only one style of spirituality whereas the quantum approach fortifies individuals as they explore and adopt spirituality conducive to their own growth. Why? The quantum paradigm emphasizes relationships and strives to improve how people relate to one another as well as to their God. This fosters a sense of community. It encourages inclusiveness that is holistic in the sense that it mobilizes the whole person because it values both the congregation's charism and the private members' individuality. It contributes to fuller engagement and a more mature spirituality because it strives to hold in creative tension the expression and development of both the congregation's historic purpose and the members' private selves. Quantum physicist David Bohm defined human beings as "intentionally directed energy" (Bohm 1980). A religious congregation offers a worthwhile focus for that "intentionality" as members live and strive together to live Gospel values in a changing world.

## CONCLUSION

With all this said, it is still important to understand that leaders must not fall into the trap of thinking that the quantum paradigm will or should replace the venerable and well-proven traditional paradigm in all instances. Instead, leaders need to appreciate that each paradigm addresses different aspects of the community's life, and they would be wise to become adept at accommodating both approaches, since the future of religious life may well depend on this. The traditional approach lends itself to situations that are predictable and subject to control. The quantum paradigm is useful for understanding unfamiliar events in complex living systems that are in changing environments. It lends itself to situations that arise during turbulent times; i.e., where there are strong pressures to change, events seem to be chaotic, objectives have become ambiguous and order seems to emerge of its own accord and in its own time. Certainly this describes today's environment perfectly!

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**P**riests and lay ecclesial ministers often work together in a variety of pastoral settings. One of those contexts is a collaboration in which the lay minister serves as the parish pastoral coordinator, overseeing the day-to-day activity of the parish, while the priest serves as the sacramental minister, sometimes for a number of parishes simultaneously. **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** invited lay pastoral minister Kirsten Thorstad and sacramental minister Rev. David Anandel of the Diocese of San Bernardino to reflect on their collaboration.

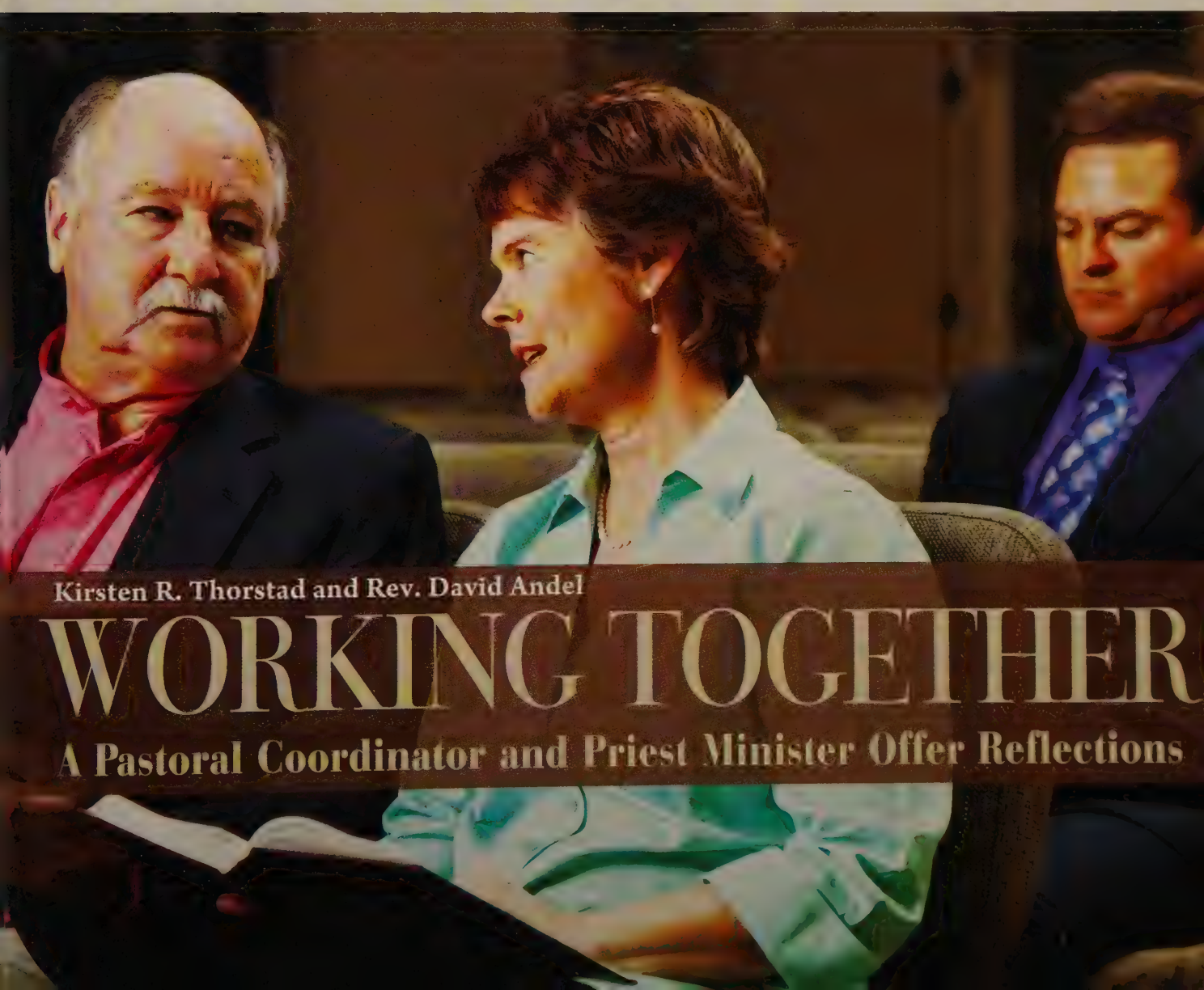
**Kirsten Thorstad writes:**

"What do you do all day?" This is the question asked frequently by my mom, now 85 years old. She grew up and even worked for a short time in a church that had many priests in the rectory serving the people. My response is, "Helping people prepare for weddings or funerals, pastoral counseling, empowering a gifted professional staff and more than 60 volunteer lay leaders of ministries, managing the fiscal realities of a parish with a large debt . . . leading people to Christ." Sometimes my mom will respond lovingly, "And that takes all day?"

As a pastoral coordinator, now serving in my fourteenth year and second assignment, I recognize that this model is still new. We are in the pioneering phase. Some are baffled by a lay woman leading a church. In fact I recently heard a person say to me on a personal retreat that she had no idea there was "such a thing" in the Catholic Church. There continues to be debate over the call of the laity and whether there is an ecclesial ministry that stems from baptism. But I know that my twenty years of professional ministry in this diocese and previous experiences in liturgical and youth ministries in other dioceses was not a role I entered into lightly. The Vatican II document *Lumen gentium* states:

The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children. He guides the church in the way of all truth and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits (LG 4).

Throughout the United States, it is estimated that there are more than five hundred churches led by a non-ordained pastor



Kirsten R. Thorstad and Rev. David Anandel

# WORKING TOGETHER

A Pastoral Coordinator and Priest Minister Offer Reflections



as is authorized under Canon 517.2. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate states:

Over the last decade, the number of Catholic parishes in the United States entrusted to deacons, religious sisters and brothers, and other lay persons has grown from 268 in 1993 to 566 in 2004. Those numbers represent a doubling in the numbers of parishes entrusted to someone other than a priest during this period from 1.4 percent of all parishes in the United States to 3.0 percent (CARA, 2005, p. 1).

Some bishops find this model of leadership life-giving. For those parishes where this model is successful, the community of faith is able to observe and be a part of a collaboration of lay and ordained, men and women, professional and volunteer working together to build up the kingdom of God.

In my situation, I am blessed to work side by side with a resident priest who shares his giftedness with our parish community and our local diocese. As the Judicial Vicar and Director of the Office of Canonical Services for the Diocese of San Bernardino, his time is now split equally between the parish and this diocesan job. But he is the priest that all of our households see regularly for Mass. He is the priest that is there to pray with their families during times of illness and death or to counsel them in times of need. He and the two deacons are the ones who lead the families during the joyful times of baptism and sorrowful times of funerals.

We utilize a team approach as best we can. After six years of collaborating, we have found much common ground around the differing charisms we each bring to the community. I respect the wisdom that he shares with me and our ministry staff and we provide to each other with mutual support drawing from our differing backgrounds. Together we have used our "gifts and leadership roles always for the good of the Church, equipping the community for every good work and strengthening it for its mission in the world" as called for in the recent USCCB document, *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* (USCCB, 2005, p. 26).

I have very few regrets about the decision to combine my professional life of teaching, business and sales, along with my volunteer ministry background in religious education and liturgy into this vocation. I have worked for and alongside some wonderful faith-filled and collaborative priests and bishops. My call has led me into a position of pastoral leadership, valued by the people I serve and the bishop who has appointed me. The ministry description for the role of pastoral coordinator in this diocese states:

The pastoral leader is understood to be a unifying presence within the faith community. Being rooted in Christ, this servant leader represents the values of the gospel, linking the people with their tradition and history; thus providing the context for a faith vision of the future" (Diocese of San Bernardino, 2009, p. 2).

This position is a holistic one. Many think it just involves administrative details, but it is also a spiritual and pastoral position. My favorite times of ministry are those where a person's faith is strengthened through a time of healing, a time of uncovered giftedness or an enlightened learning about our faith tradition.

The role of women and men collaborating in ministry is not new. Whereas women have not been in the hierarchical structure, women have served the community of baptized believers in vital and necessary roles, working side by side with priests and deacons, each bringing a necessary giftedness to their role of service. Paul's letter to the Romans gives specific names to the women chosen to lead the church. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is also a minister of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the holy ones, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor to many and to me as well" (NAB, 16:1-2). The original Greek word for Phoebe's calling is *diakonis*, or minister in English. Romans reveals that both men and women worked side by side in the early church. Prisca (Priscilla) is called by name as a missionary and coworker who led a house church

(Romans 16:3). Prisca's presence with other *synergoi* (co-workers) leads to the conclusion that some women were central in the framing of early missionary activities. We need each other, men and women, clerics and laity, young and old, rich and poor to fulfill the needs of the whole community.

*Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* reemphasizes the need for an integrated relationship between the ordained and non-ordained. "Lay collaboration with ordained ministers cannot mean substitution for ordained ministry . . . the collaboration with the ordained require of lay ecclesial ministers a special level of professional competence and presence to the community" (USCCB, 2005, p. 12). I respect the role of the priest and am not trying to take his place. The community needs the charisms we both bring. The community is called to holiness and wholeness through both of our roles, a lay leader and an ordained priest.

Holistic ministry as well as individual holiness are essential in this model of leadership. "Holiness, biblically, means otherness, incomprehensibility, beyond conception, beyond imagination, awesome, awe-ful" (Rolheiser, 2001, p. 108). I strive to work in a holistic manner, to pursue holiness in my daily life, and to inspire others to live lives in conformity with the Gospel.

As a lay woman, I am uniquely called and gifted, and I am grateful for the opportunities I have been given. "The laity have special responsibility to penetrate the secular sphere with the spirit of Christ, and to leaven it with the yeast of the gospel, so that human efforts may be sustained by hope" (Dulles, 2002, p. 205)

Catherine of Siena concludes her *Dialogue* by stating, "I thank you now, high eternal Father, for the measureless kindness you have shown me, though I am miserably undeserving of any favor" (Noffke, 1980, p. 326). I am humbled and gratified by the many opportunities God has presented me. If all of us who minister strive for wholeness and holiness, then neither men nor women will be threatened by the other. We will continue to complement one another and find the will of God in collaborating and working together. This passage continues to guide me: "You have been told,



O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you; only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God" (NAB, Micah 7:8).

So to answer my Mom's central question, "What do you do all day?" – I strive to do right, love goodness, and walk humbly with God in union with those I serve.

#### Rev. David Andel writes:

Saint Paul tells the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female" (3:28). So then, what is there? *Plenty of good work to go around*; the work of preaching the Gospel and leading people to Christ. Good work for Jew and Greek, boss and employee, male and female. As a diocesan priest for seventeen years, I have been a parish administrator for two years and worked as a parochial vicar and priest minister for thirteen (there were two years of Canon Law studies). For the past six years I have had a variety of wonderful "bosses"—two diocesan priests, one deacon, one layman and now one laywoman. Even though I have my philosophical, theological and canonical issues with the practical implementation of Canon 517.2, at the end of the day (and at the beginning), there is a lot of good ministerial work to do, plenty to go around, and it really doesn't matter much who does it or under what title. As a pastor, no matter what I am called—parochial vicar or priest minister—I will be doing the same things.

When I first began my assignment as a priest minister nine years ago, I spent only one day a week in the Office of Canonical Services. Now I spend three days per week there, and I'm only in the parish on weekends. From the beginning of my assignment as priest minister, I have appreciated being able to spend most of my time teaching and sanctifying, offices for which I believe I was well prepared in the seminary. And while I believe the office of governance is inherently part of being a priest, I am able to leave most of the administrative and hierarchical decisions to the pastoral coordinator, just as I left those same decisions to my pastor when I was his parochial vicar. Is there a difference

between being a priest minister and a parochial vicar? In some ways, yes, there is—the people expect the priest to be in charge of the parish and are often surprised to find out I'm not, and I do feel less of a father and pastor to the people. In some ways, though, the differences are negligible because I still celebrate the sacraments, spiritually direct people in the office, teach classes, visit people in their homes, drop by the various ministries, prepare couples for marriage and attend staff meetings. This is the bulk of what I did as a parish administrator, it is what I do now and it is what I will do as a pastor in the future.

Whether I work with a pastor or a pastoral coordinator, the relationship requires collaboration. That is a non-negotiable (the necessity of collaborating well in ministry has been well chronicled). The relationship also requires mutual respect—respect for the other person's education, opinion, expertise, background and yes, gender, if that is the case. The working relationship requires humility—I cannot be jealous of the pastoral coordinator's power to make financial decisions, chair the pastoral and finance councils and give true pastoral direction to the parish, and the pastoral coordinator cannot be jealous of my right to preach and direct the liturgy or the fact that most people know the priest and want to see him. It is even better, in fact, to give each other a certain amount of autonomy and to be proud of one another's work, rejoicing in one another's triumphs and mourning together with one another's struggles. The days are long gone when priests could work independently of the laity or lord their authority over others; it's time to work together respectfully.

In the end, I leave the theological and canonical subtleties for other, greater minds to debate. I don't have the inclination or the time. I have plenty of good work to do now.

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# Committees: Advocates or "Table-Setters"?

George Wilson, S.J.

Let's say you have just been elected to your parish council. At a recent meeting it was reported that there is considerable dissatisfaction among parish members over the congested traffic in the parking lot on Sunday mornings. The council asks you to serve on an ad-hoc committee, to look into the situation and report back to it with a proposed solution. Do you have a clear picture of what is expected of you?

## THE TYPICAL MODEL

What usually happens is that such a committee begins by spending considerable time exploring the dimensions of the problem. Then they debate—"wrestle" might capture the situation more fairly—in an attempt to formulate their recommendation. (In a spirit of Christian charity we won't go into the hour-long struggle between Harry and Sally about perpendicular lines vs. diagonal ones.) Finally, after investing a lot of time and energy the committee settles on a solution. The chair, Mildred, reflects the mood of the whole committee when she says on the way out the door, "It took us so much time and work to reach consensus, the council better approve our proposal."

At the next council meeting Mildred presents the committee's proposal. Then the fun begins.

Here's what happens in many such cases. The committee presents only their proposal, the bare-bones idea: "We recommend rerouting the traffic by connecting the parking lot to the convent driveway." Then the council members begin to pull apart all the pluses and minuses they foresee in the proposal, repeating—in a much shorter period of time, and therefore quite imperfectly—all the work the committee did over weeks of discussion.

And you can be sure that at some point in the conversation some council member will say, "How about leaving the parking pattern as is but asking the boosters to direct traffic?" Of course, that happens to be one of the ideas the

committee originally considered, but ultimately rejected. The council then goes off chasing *that* rabbit, repeating the arguments that had frustrated the committee for weeks.

## A SLIGHTLY BETTER APPROACH

We'll suppose that your committee is wiser than that. It takes a better approach: besides presenting the substance of the proposal, it also supplies the council with the *rationale* that supports the position you are advocating. Included with your proposed solution is an assessment of its probable benefits and risks—the upside and downside consequences of pursuing that course of action.

Your committee's approach spares the council from having to do that part of the work. Including the rationale is not only an improvement, it should be a given. No self-respecting council should accept proposals that don't include a rationale for a proposal it is being asked to adopt. Unsupported proposals should be "returned to sender."

But even with a presentation of the rationale there is still the potential for much needless conflict and fragmentation of the community. Let's imagine some possible scenarios, with different outcomes.

In the first example we learn that the members of the council really don't like your proposal, even with an attached rationale. The conversation reveals that council members would prefer a different solution, perhaps one of the ones that the committee members had already considered and rejected. It appears that the committee's proposal is going to go down to defeat.

Chairperson Mildred begins to have vivid recollections of the painful struggles the committee went through before reaching enough consensus in support of the option on the table. (We'll overlook the fact that she and council president Tom had a knock-down-drag-out fight over vouchers when they were on the school board a few years ago. Organizational tinkering



*A wise council  
charges its  
committees to  
present for its  
deliberation, not  
the solution, but a  
menu of multiple  
potential solutions.*

won't solve interpersonal conflicts.) The committee members took ownership of their proposal, and she anticipates the frustration and anger that members of her committee are going to vent when they discover that the result of all that hard work has been rejected. She can almost hear Harry's voice as he declares, "If that's the way we are treated, they'll never get me to work on a committee again!" Her voice goes up an octave as her advocacy for the proposal sets deeper in concrete.

Will it be the council's position—or the committee's? Somebody is going to lose. The fabric of the parish community is going to be at least frayed, if not totally shredded.

But wait! There's a solution! Council member Betty reminds the rest of the members that they are, after all, a *church* body. "We're not General Motors! We don't throw people under the bus, we care for them. The committee did all that work, let's go along with them even though we might not think their solution is the best thing to come down the aisle. . . ." The heavy thumb of gospel values is put on the scale. It's tough to fight *that*. Besides, there are other items still on the agenda and it's getting late. So the committee's proposal is adopted. Peace reigns in St. Beatitudina.

#### PEACE AT WHAT PRICE?

Under canon law, the parish council was set up as the body to give advice to pastors. In fact, however, under the scenario we just read the council deferred to the judgment of the committee. Out of a skewed view of gospel care the council avoided the conflict, to be sure; but it also abdicated its responsibility. In effect, the committee became the deciders. It is a quite common occurrence: bodies that are supposed to be decision-makers become rubber stamps controlled by their committees.

Of course there is a second possible outcome: the council simply exerts its appropriate authority, digs in its heels, and rejects the committee's decision in favor of one of its own making. In that case Henry is not the only committee member who resigns. They

all do. "We thought we were serving the community, and our work was simply dismissed."

#### WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Why do so many people feel they've seen this movie—or even acted in it? After all, your fellow committee members are people of good will, only trying to serve the parish community. So are the members of the council. Everyone played the part they were given with the best of intentions.

Listen to some of the phrases in the story. They "played their part." Mildred "advocated" for the proposal offered by the committee. The committee presented the council with "their" proposal. It's all about investment and ownership—when the conciliar discussion hasn't even begun.

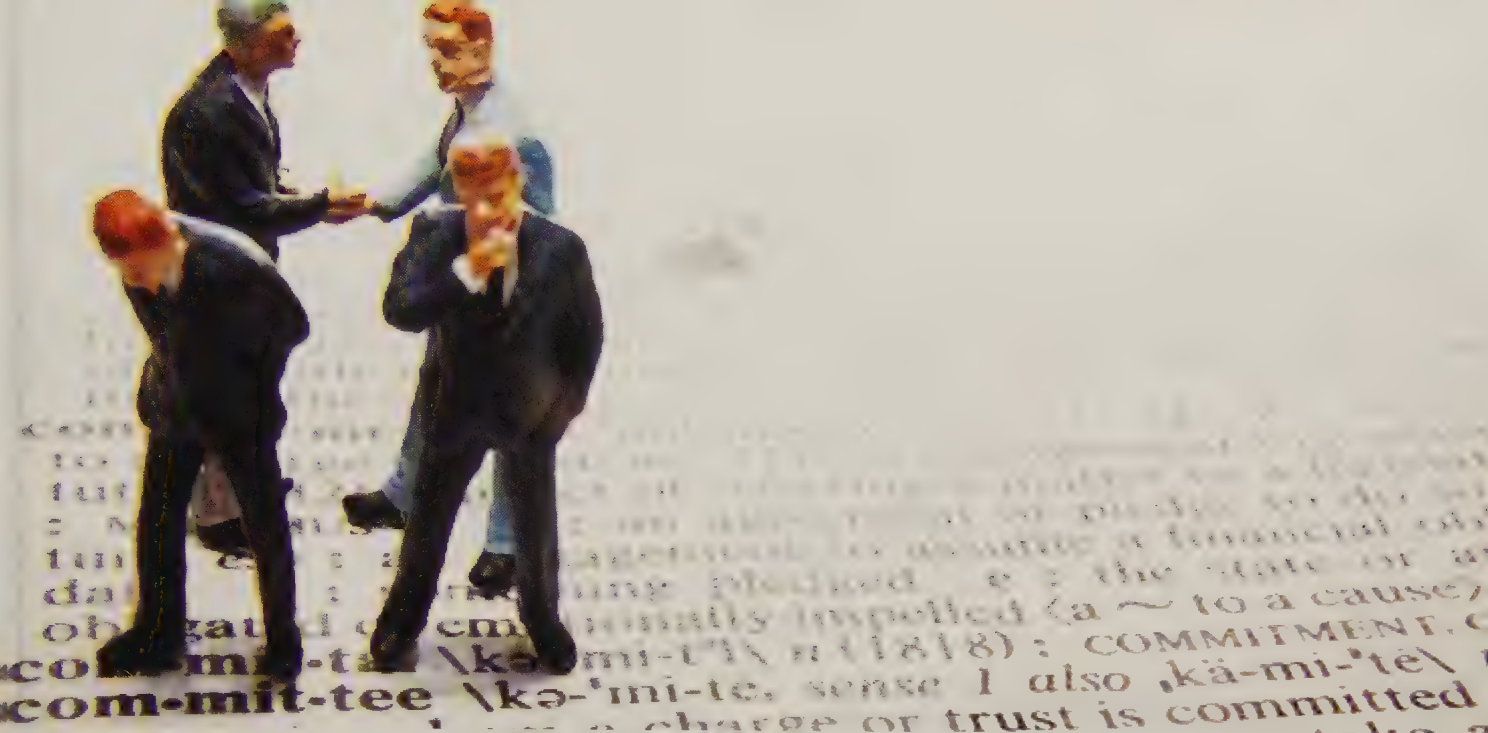
#### WHAT IF THE WHOLE SET OF ROLES WAS SKEWED IN THE FIRST PLACE?

Imagine how the story might play out if the committee—and therefore, the council—were assigned a different relationship. Suppose there was a whole different script, a different set of expectations, placed on the committee as it assumed its role and began its work. It makes a big difference if you think you are supposed to be Hamlet when the script calls for Polonius.

What might a more effective role description for committees look like? What shifts of consciousness might be required in order to have a clear and constructive relationship between a council (or board) and its committees?

The first change would be in the expected outcome, the product being looked for. A wise council charges its committees to present for its deliberation, not *the* solution, but a *menu of multiple potential solutions*. The worm in the apple is the expectation that the committee will propose a single solution. It is that expectation that generates the premature ownership and advocacy. It almost guarantees the win-lose outcome we have been describing.





If the committee is expected to produce possible options rather than a single proposed solution, a significant change in attitude becomes evident. The members of the committee are freed up. They don't have to agree on the substance of any idea they are going to put forward. They only have to agree that Option A (or B or C or X) is worth consideration by the eventual deciders. Because committee members don't have to reach agreement on the substance of a single answer, they become more relaxed, more free—and usually more creative. They can entertain possibilities they may not personally espouse. They are not in the heat of the kitchen, they're out on the patio thinking what it might be like to mix different combinations of ingredients. Playing with possibilities is the beginning of good decision-making, and it's hard to have the appropriate detachment if you feel pressured to agree on a single answer.

That doesn't mean that the work of a good committee is all froth. There is work to be done—demanding analytical work. The committee's work is not done when it prepares a list of possible options: "You might choose to extend the parking lot by taking out the pastor's garden," or "You could move the Blessed Virgin statue to the other side of the church and gain twelve new spaces," etc. An effective committee's job is also

to attach to each option all the real or potential consequences of each option. "If you take Option A you will increase the number of parking spaces but the Sodality group will be upset because they donated the garden; if you go with Option B we won't have to pay contractors for the new paving, but you will be taking the risk that the Boosters won't have enough guards available every week."

Every option will achieve some good, but every one will involve some form of cost or risk. One of the services a good committee provides for a board or council is to take away the illusion that, if the council only wrestles with the issue longer, they will hit upon a cost-free solution. Searching for that kind of answer is a form of utopianism. It's not Christian spirituality. The reason genuine decision-making is so difficult is that it always involves commitment to a limited, finite good. And it always involves having to say no to other good options, each of which would have achieved its own form of benefit, but which would also bring different downsides.

#### THE LIKELY RESULT

If a committee is charged to "set the table" and freed from the burden of advocacy, what difference does it make?

When such a committee completes its work effectively and presents the council with a clear set of options and their consequences, the members of a council are likely to say, "Under the pressure to make a decision we could never have had the detachment required to think outside our initial pre-judgments. You didn't try to steer our decision by advocating in one direction rather than another. Your menu didn't make our decision-making easier, but by expanding our options you made the issue clearer. That left us with the burden of making the decision, which is precisely our mandate as a council. It felt cleaner all around. Thank you."

Not the full flowering of the Kingdom, to be sure, but a little bit more peace in the vineyard.



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John Navone, S.J.

# HEARING GOD'S WORD IN

# *Silence*





We cannot speak until we are spoken to. We have learned our native language by habitually hearing it spoken. To be human is to be able to speak, to say "Yes" or "No"; to be able to respond to places, times, people and to God. There is a sense in which the basic form of speech is prayer, a response, our acknowledgement that all things come into being through the Word that is with God from the beginning, the Word that God is said to be. To be human is to be answerable, response-able to and for each other, and to the mystery of God.

If the faith of the Christian community comes from hearing, it requires being receptive to silence, which allows us to hear both the external word of proclamation and the interior

word of God's gracious self-communication. When the God of the historical biblical revelation speaks his saving word, his people must listen. Insofar as the good news of what God is doing in his incarnate Word for our salvation is heard only within that inner space of a receptive silence, persons full of themselves in various forms of self-idolatry risk being out of touch with the love that can save them.

The Triune God at the heart of Christian life is revealed as the speaking Father, the spoken Son and their beloved Spirit. Jesus, the Word Incarnate, affirms that his words are not his own; they belong to the Father who sent him (Jn 14:24). To hear the Spoken Word is to hear its Speaker. Similarly, those who see Jesus with the eyes of faith see his Father (Jn 14:9).



*God speaks  
the Word of his  
meaning to the  
meaningless, the  
Word of his life  
to the lifeless  
and the Word  
of his love to  
the loveless.*

Believers come to understand that the Speaker of the Word is known in the Beloved Spirit of the Spoken Word. Hence, with Peter the Christian community affirms of its Lord: "You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). The cognitive and affective consciousness of the human spirit reflects the consciousness of its knowing and loving Creator. God is spirit, and his worshipers worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24), participating in his transforming cognitive-affective consciousness/life.

The same transforming work of the Triune God has also been expressed allegorically in terms of his shaping hands. St. Irenaeus of Lyons allegorically calls the Son and the Holy Spirit the "hands of God" (*Adversus Haereses* 5:1, 3, 5; 5:28). Irenaeus believes that the Father is always at work in human history, shaping humankind into the image of the three divine Persons, because the words "Let us make humankind after our image and likeness" are addressed by the Father to the Son and Holy Spirit. The Father creates, embraces and draws all humankind with his two "hands," his Son and Spirit, into the heart of the Triune communion. The Christian community celebrates Easter and Pentecost in gratitude for the Father's outreaching "hands."

The Annunciation is an icon of the Triune God as Speaker, Spoken, and Beloved. The Father speaks and the Son is spoken in the Spirit of their reciprocal love. The Father expresses all that he is in the truth of his Word and in the love of his Spirit. The Father, who eternally communicates the fullness of his meaning in his Son/Word and the fullness of his love in their Spirit, graciously divinizes us with the meaning of his Word and the love of his Spirit.

There is reciprocity in the freedom of God's word and the freedom of Mary's response; for love cannot be coerced. The Word of the Triune God enables and calls for Mary's response. God's Word of love enables our response-ability. Loving persons are responsible persons. The Generous One does not command, but proposes, a new creation, infinitely surpassing all the possibilities and expectations of the first creation: a unique communion,

community and communication of all human persons under the sovereignty of God's love.

God announces his offer to Mary through his messenger, inviting her to communicate the meaning of his Word and the joy of his Spirit to the world. God's "speaking" enlivens the world with a new meaning, with a love and joy that are not its own. God speaks the Word of his meaning to the meaningless, the Word of his life to the lifeless and the Word of his love to the loveless: "The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life" (Jn 6:63). The Father's self-giving fills his creation with the Word of his meaning and the Spirit of his love.

THE WELCOMING HEARERS OF  
THE WORD

The annunciation of the Incarnation is the good news of the Triune God's decision to embrace humankind within the body of the Son and in the temple of their Spirit. It is the Good News of Happiness Itself revealing and sharing Itself as our origin, ground and destiny in the fullness of Life Itself. The silence of Mary is the precondition for her hearing and listening to the divine Word's revelation of the good news of the Incarnation. The Word requires the silence in which it is born and heard. Silence is the appropriate response to the awe-inspiring beauty of the Word. Silence is the kenotic de-centering of the self in response to what transcends it. Silence lets go of the self to welcome and make room for the presence of the Other. The apophatic silence of the Father precedes the kataphatic utterance of his Word at the Annunciation. Silent attention is the precondition for our responding to the grace and call of God's saving Word.

God's creative Word brings the world into being; it requires a silence in which to be born and a background of silence against which to be heard. Silence is where we encounter the Ground of Being. Silence and revelation go hand in hand; they are two sides of the same coin. We see this in the gospel narratives where Jesus reveals his true self, his divinity, in a healing miracle



where he orders the persons concerned not to tell anyone about it. They must keep silence—see for example, the healing of Jarius' daughter (Mk 5:43), the leper (Mk 1:44) and the deaf man (Mk 7:36). At the time of his transfiguration, the disciples who are with him have an experience of God in the cloud and their reaction is silence (Lk 9:36; Mt. 17:19; Mk 9:9). Silence is the appropriate response to the awe-inspiring, the marvelous and the beautiful.

If an encounter with God leads to silence, then perhaps silence leads to an encounter with God. We have to empty ourselves of ourselves, as Jesus did on the cross (Phil. 2:7), so that we may hear the Word of God dwelling within our hearts. The prayer of silence is at the heart of the Christian contemplative tradition, and it is not without precedent. Jesus was in the habit of withdrawing to deserted places to pray (Lk 5:16), often spending the night in prayer on the mountainside (Lk 6:12). As well as advising us not to heap up empty phrases, Jesus commands us to "pray in secret" (Mt 6:6). A secret is something we keep silent about. It means don't tell anyone.

We cultivate silence to draw aside the mental screen on which we project everyday life, a mode of being characterized by distraction, of being anywhere and indeed everywhere else but here and now. We fall silent to make ourselves present to the presence of God. Most of the time we are simply not present, even to ourselves or each other, never mind God. We encounter God in the silence that is at the heart of being, and therefore of our being too. It is the place where we can share in that Being in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Inasmuch as our lives originate in the silence of the womb and conclude in the silence of the tomb, we should profit from the intervals of silence in between to hear something of our origin and destiny, the Alpha and Omega.

Describing the role of spiritual conversation in pastoral care, Drew Chistiansen, in his article "Heart and Soul" (*America*, July 30, 2012, p. 20) affirms that in our hyperactive, overly connected society, spiritual friends

must become acquainted with silence in order to hear the Spirit speaking within and in the world. We need to cultivate silence to listen deeply to one another. Silence, he believes, provides the soil in which the Gospel can take root and the air in which to hear the whispering Spirit as it blows. He concludes that as we undertake the new evangelization with searchers and the disaffected as well as with zealous souls longing for holiness, pastors of souls who seek to be spiritual friends will need to be familiar with silence.

#### THE LISTENING PEOPLE OF A LISTENING GOD

Unlike people who sought revelation through visions, the Jews primarily sought revelation through hearing. Hearing symbolized receptivity, the proper response to the God who speaks to his people. God opens the ears of his people to hear his word (Job 36:10; Is 50:4-5), gives the ears of the prophets his revelation (Is 22:14; 50:4-5) and exhorts his people either directly or through prophets to "hear" his revelation (Deut 5:1; Jer 2:4; Rev 2:7). Without faithfully hearing God's word there is no communion or friendship with God. The failure to hear is the decisive rebellion against God (Is 48:8; Heb 3:7-8). The story of Elijah on Mount Horeb tells how we expect God to act in the silence of our lives: "And after the fire, the sound of sheer silence" (1 Kgs 19:12).

The tone of the biblical command, "Be silent, Israel, and listen!" (Deut 27:9), indicates that people who want to listen to God must learn to value silence. John of the Cross affirms the importance of silence for the spiritual life: "The Father speaks one Word which is his Son, and repeats it forever in eternal silence, and so in silence it must be heard by the soul" (Giovanni della Croce, *Spunti d'amore*, 21, in *Opere*, Rome, 1967). God's supremacy is recognized and accepted by the believer before all else "in silent and prolonged prayer" (Carlo Cardinal Martini, S. J., *Il sogno di Giacobbe*, Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1989, p. 80). If, on God's part, "in the beginning was the Word" and in

*Silence is the appropriate response to the awe-inspiring, the marvelous and the beautiful.*



this Word we have been given "grace and truth" (Jn 1:1, 14), then, on our part, the starting point must be a reverent and welcoming silence. Since God is Word, listening is the way our conversation begins. The question-raising and questioning-answering Holy Mystery is the voice of conscience at the heart of every human life, the context for the faith that comes from hearing (Rom 10:17).

Idols are deaf (Deut 4:28; Rev 9:20), but God hears his people (2 Sam 22:7). Prayers and petitions to God begin with a request to God to "incline your ear" (Ps 17:6), to be favorably disposed to what is heard (Jer 34:14; Ps 31:2). God hears his people groaning in bondage (Ex 3:7), facing their enemies in battle (Isa 37:17), crying out in barrenness (Gen 30:6) and complaining when unjustly treated (Jas 5:4). God hears the prayers of the righteous (Ps 17:1; 1 Pet 3:12) and those asking according to his will (1 Jn 5:14). Accordingly, God always hears the prayers of Jesus (Jn 11:41-42; Heb 5:7).

God commands us to listen to Jesus, his Word Incarnate, in faith and obedience (Mt 17:5). The parable of the

sower demonstrates that the efficacy of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom depends on our faithful hearing/receptivity: "Let anyone with ears listen!" (Mt 13:9). To hear the Word of God is to be a child of God (Jn 8:47) and a sheep hearing the voice of the Shepherd (Jn 10:3, 16, 27). The Shepherd of Israel speaks through the Good Shepherd who will genuinely care for his people (Ezek 34:8-10). Not to hear his voice is to be spiritually impaired (Mt 13:14-16), and to remain unforgiven (Jn 12:47-49). Hearing is a blessing and life, and not hearing is a judgment (Job 36:10-12; Jn 5:24).

Martha learned from Jesus himself that our fundamental relationship to God is one of receptivity (Lk 10:38-42). Mary's receptivity in listening is more important than Martha's activity. A loving receptivity in faith grounds our relationship to God, whereas, in relation to others, the Good Samaritan story (Lk 10: 30-37) teaches that our fundamental relationship to others should be one of giving. Luke's two stories complement each other in teaching that we can only give to others what we have received from God.

In the intimacy of the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples that "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23). Friendship with Christ is deepened by hearing his word and putting it into practice (Lk 8:19-21). Such familiarity leads to our identification with his person and mission. Our greatest moral possibility is to let ourselves be acted upon by God; for when we accept divine love, we become most like it. That is what it is to be moved by the Spirit, by the Love of God, whose gifts allow us to be empowered by the personal power and love of God.

The God of the historical biblical revelation manifests himself first and then many times through the prophets, and then definitively in his Son (Heb 1:2). "Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (Col 1:15, 1 Tim 1:17) out of the abundance of his love speaks to us as friends (Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15) and lives among us (Bar 3:38), so that he may invite and take us into fellowship with himself" (*Dei Verbum*, 2).





## THE SILENCE OF JESUS

Benedict XVI gave a catechesis on the silence of Jesus, during a general audience held in St. Peter's Square, March 7, 2012. He made reference to the role of silence especially at Golgotha:

Here we find ourselves before "the word of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18). The word is muted; it becomes mortal silence, for it has "spoken" exhaustively, holding back nothing of what it had to tell us. Faced with this silence of the cross, St. Maximus the Confessor places on the lips of the Mother of God this phrase: "Wordless is the Word of the Father, who made every creature which speaks; lifeless are the eyes of the one at whose word and whose nod all living things move (*The Life of Mary*, no. 89: *Marian texts of the first millennium 2*, Rome, 1989, p. 253).

The cross of Christ not only portrays the silence of Jesus as his final word to the Father; it also reveals that God speaks through the silence. Advancing in obedience towards his very last breath, in the obscurity of death, he commended himself to God at the moment of passage: "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit" (Lk 23:46). This experience of Jesus speaks deeply to our situation; for after having heard and acknowledging God's Word, we must also measure ourselves by God's silence, which is an important expression of the same Word.

The interplay of word and silence that marks the prayer of Jesus during his earthly life—especially on the cross—also touches our own prayer lives in two ways. The first concerns our welcoming God's Word. Interior and exterior silence are necessary in order that this word may be heard. This is especially difficult in an age that does not foster recollection. Education in the value of silence entails our rediscovering the role of recollection and inner peace in the life of the church. The great patristic tradition teaches that the

mysteries of Christ involve silence, for only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the Word and, inseparably, woman of silence.

The Gospels often present Jesus—especially at times of crucial decisions—withdrawing alone to a place apart from the crowds and from his own disciples, in order to pray in silence and to abide in his filial relationship with God. Silence is capable of creating a space in our inmost depths so that God may abide there, where the Word may remain in us, so that his love may be rooted in our minds and hearts and animate our lives.

There is a second element in the relation of silence with prayer: the silence of God. But this silence, which Jesus also experiences, is not a sign of his absence. The Christian knows that the Lord is present and listening, even in the darkness of suffering, rejection and solitude. Jesus reassures the disciples and us that God knows our needs. He teaches his disciples, "In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt 6:7-8). An attentive, silent, open heart, confident that God knows and loves us more intimately and deeply than we know and love ourselves, is more important than many words.

Jesus teaches us how to pray not only with the Our Father, but also when he himself prays. In this way he teaches us three dispositions necessary for true prayer: purity of heart that seeks the sovereignty of God's love and forgives one's enemies, bold and filial faith that goes beyond what we feel and understand, and watchfulness that defends us from temptation. Reading the Gospels we see how Jesus is our prayer-partner, friend, witness and teacher. We learn from Jesus how constant prayer helps us to interpret our lives, to make our decisions and choices, to recognize and welcome our vocation, to discover our God-given talents and to discern and do his will daily. The prayer of Jesus and the gift of his Holy Spirit are the enabling grace for our lives, and they call for our prayerful response.

## THE THEME OF SILENCE IN SPIRITUALITY AND WORSHIP

The cessation of speech for the sake of prayer, reflection and greater attentiveness to God is central to spirituality and worship. Although it is partially true that this traditional understanding of silence implies an incompatibility between silence and word, it can also be misleading. Granted that speech manifests the distinctive self-possession and presence-to-others of human persons, it may also be degraded into a flight from oneself, others and God. Many forms of speech are no more than a diversion from reality and a waste of time, discouraging rather than promoting meaningful communication.

The opposition between perceptive silence and empty speech is witnessed in the development of monasticism, in which silence came to be identified with withdrawal from the world to seek a life of perfection in contemplation. The silence of Christian spirituality and worship is not so much an absence of words as a loving receptivity to the Holy Mystery speaking within it. The reciprocity of love entails both the silence of God hearing the cries of the human heart and that of persons awaiting his response in the loving silence of human and divine communion. The silence of mutual respect and attention expresses the love that takes both the Divine and human seriously.

Monastic silence is ordered to the word that comes out of silence. If we must learn to listen, we must also listen to learn. That is one of the great tasks of monastic spirituality. And that means not only to listen to the Word of God in the scriptures, but to listen always and everywhere with all our hearts. Without the discipline of silence it becomes impossible to engage in meaningful dialogue with both divine and human others; for we cannot speak and listen at the same time. Our urgency to speak prevents us from absorbing what the other is communicating; whereas silence facilitates our attending to the murmuring of the Spirit dwelling within and among us.

Religious obedience, as practiced in the Christian tradition, means learning to tune in and listen to God's word; in



# *The Annunciation discloses the mystery of the Triune God's Word of Love to and for all humankind.*

fact, *obaudire* means "to listen thoroughly." All creation is a word of God; for we know that God speaks to us through everything. Ultimately, God has only one thing to say, which is, "I love you." God's inexhaustible message is spelled out for ever and ever. Monastic obedience is not an end in itself; rather, it is a precondition for tuning in to God's word, enlightening us about what to do within the concrete, historical particularities of daily life. The aim of listening obedience is to find meaning in life. When we find something totally meaningless, we say that it is absurd. Interestingly enough, the Latin root *absurdus* means "out of tune." In the religious context, the absurd is not in harmony with the Supreme Goodness, Truth and Beauty that is the Origin, Ground and Destiny of creation. The meaning we seek is not of anything in particular, but of that ultimate meaning in which our hearts can rest. Our senses are involved in this quest for meaning; for the Word is made flesh when God speaks to us through our senses.

## THE LOVING WORD OF HAPPINESS ITSELF

The Annunciation discloses the mystery of the Triune God's Word of Love to and for all humankind. God's Word is always a Word of Love Itself, because God is Love. Eternal Life, Love and Happiness are all aspects of the same Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Context of the Annunciation. Aquinas is in the biblical tradition when he calls God, *Ipsa Felicitas* or Happiness Itself. The Annunciation discloses the mystery of Happiness Itself offering the fullness of its life to all humankind. The angel's salutation, "Hail, Mary, full of grace," adumbrates the fullness of life that the Triune God invites Mary to communicate for his new creation.

The new creation begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit of Happiness Itself and the Incarnation of Happiness Itself as the grace and invitation of the Triune Happiness. In this way we understand the Father as Speaker of the Word, the Son as Spoken Expression of

the Speaker and the Spirit as the Joyful Reciprocity of the Speaker and the Spoken. Happiness communicates Itself in Word and Spirit, in Truth and Love, in Wisdom and Joy. The Triune Communion, Community and Conversation of Eternal Happiness reaches out to embrace all human life stories at the Annunciation. Mary, like her father Abraham, is blessed to be a blessing to all humankind, the bearer of Happiness Itself.

The joy of Happiness Itself becomes the joy of Mary at the Magnificat, the joy of the angels announcing the birth of her son, the joy of Israel at the presentation of the infant in the temple and throughout all the wonderful events of Luke's Gospel. The good news of Happiness Itself is a joy to all who hear and welcome it. Joyful are the eyes that see and the ears that hear how much God loves them. Our silent attention is a prerequisite for hearing the Good News.

Jesus both reveals and shares with his new creation the interior life of the Triune God, the Origin-Ground-Destiny of human life, the ultimate measure and criterion of all that is true, good and beautiful. Jesus' claims to be the Way, the Truth and the Life and the Alpha and the Omega, are claims to be the Ultimate Context and meaning of all creation. The Creator of the universe calls us to be his friends, in freedom and not slavery. He made us so that by nature we seek and inquire, restlessly and urgently. He infused an eros of understanding into our hearts, so that we might turn away from all that falls short of or falsifies truth. Our faithful pursuit of nothing but the truth makes our freedom actual. The relentless drive of inquiry lies at the heart of human community and personhood.

The mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation unveil the community, freedom and eros of inquiry embodied in the human community for seekers of a new humanism. Our Creator and Father wills a universal humanism, a civilization of friendship modeled on the love that constitutes the Triune God. As the Body of Christ and Temple of his Spirit, the church is the forerunner of



human destiny. It is called to be a witness to the communion of persons and to hope. God has called us toward his own infinite beauty, joy and goodness. God unites us in communion with one another in the sovereignty of his love. In this context, Michael Novak affirms that communion is the inner tendency of creation ("The Holy Spirit Did Preside," *First Things*, August/September, 2010, p. 23).

## THE WORD OF OUR ULTIMATE MEANING

The new atheists, as Andrew M. Seddon has observed ("The New Atheism: All the Rage," *New Oxford Review*, July-August 2012, 37), have a purely secular faith, enabling them to believe that: something came from nothing; a multiverse (for which there is no experimental or observational evidence) containing an inconceivably large number of universes spontaneously created itself; reason came from irrationality; highly complex order and information arose on their own from randomness and chaos; the personal evolved from the impersonal; love emerged from "blind, pitiless indifference," as Dawkins put it; consciousness came from non-consciousness; life emerged spontaneously from non-life; morality has meaning in a meaningless universe.

The Christian community rejects the atheistic stance that meaninglessness is the ultimate context of humankind. John Macquarrie's paraphrase of the Prologue to John's Gospel states the case for the meaningful Origin, Ground and Destiny of all creation in "Word and Idea," his informally published paper given at the International Lonergan Congress at St. Leo, Florida, (1970, p. 7):

Fundamental to everything is meaning. Meaning is closely connected with what men call "God," and indeed, meaning and God are the same. To say that God was in the beginning is to say that there was meaning in the beginning. All things were

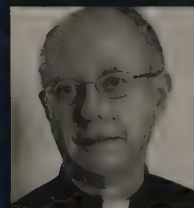
made meaningful, and there was nothing that was made meaningless. Life was the drive towards meaning and life emerged into the light of humanity, the bearer of meaning. And meaning shines out through the threat of absurdity, for absurdity has not destroyed it. Every man has a true share in the true meaning of things. This follows from the fact that this meaning has been embodied in the world from the beginning and has given the world its shape. Yet the world has not recognized the meaning. Even man, the bearer of meaning, has rejected it. But those who have received it and believed in it have been enabled to become the children of God. And this has happened not in the natural course of evolution or through human striving, but through an act of God. For the meaning has been incarnated in a human existent, in whom was grace and truth; and we have seen in him the final meaning or glory towards which everything moves—the glory of man and the glory of God (Jn 1:1-5, 9-14).

Just as there is no true understanding of anything taken outside of its context, there is no true understanding of ourselves and creation taken out of our Ultimate Context, which alone is absolutely one, good, true and beautiful (Mk 10:18).

The community of Christian faith believes that Ultimate Reality, our Ultimate Context, our Ultimate Meaning has definitively revealed itself in Jesus Christ for our true knowledge, love and enjoyment of our relational existence under the sovereignty of God's love-wisdom. The Christian community believes that in Jesus Christ and his Holy Spirit, the Triune God invites all humankind to share in true goodness, beauty, love and joy.

By the same token, we believe that we shall never know and enjoy our true goodness and beauty apart from the Ultimate Goodness, Truth, and Beauty of the Triune God.

We believe the Good News that the Incarnate Son of the Triune God, Happiness Itself, invites all humankind to life in the Holy Spirit of Happiness Itself. Our welcoming silence is a precondition for our being in touch with Happiness Itself.



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# The Realm *Beyond*

Shakespeare always got it right. He has his young prince Hamlet say, after seeing his father's ghost, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (*Hamlet* I, 5, 165-67). Horatio is just back from university (in Luther's Wittenberg, of all places), the realm of reason. Hamlet, who has just been visited from the spirit world, throws cold water on the vaunted adequacy of reason.

In our times, scientific explanation alone generates confidence. What does not yield readily to measurement and testing—the existence of a Creator, for example—carries little weight in the Academy. This skeptical climate is not hospitable, either, to talk of evil forces, evil spirits. And psychology, aspiring to be science, remains pretty mute on the topic, if I am not mistaken.

Looking back to the times of Jesus, what do we make of the prevalence of exorcisms, the banishment of demons, in his ministry? Jesus is seen as taking on the Adversary on our behalf, at a fearful cost. As Joachim Jeremias put it, "Jesus comes with the authority of God, not only to carry out mercy, but also, and foremost, to engage in the struggle against the Evil One."

So has our planet been cleared of otherworldly threats? The history of the past century surely indicates otherwise, as does our present overload of fury and mental miseries. Luke Timothy Johnson, the New Testament scholar, made this recent reflection:

A somber conclusion arises from our common experience of life: there exist powers, at work in and through humans yet commanding a superhuman blind energy, that labor not for our good, but for the destruction of humans and of all human beauty and grace.

There are systems of enslavement today whose evil, in Johnson's words, "transcends the intentions and acts even of individuals caught up" in them. The systems as such merit the kind of determined opposition that gave birth to liberation

theology and is at work now in anti-torture movements and resistance to human trafficking.

The church has taken a decisive turn towards pastoral care of individuals judged to be tormented beyond what therapy and psychiatric treatment can resolve. Pastors and bishops have long been wary of "the crazies," most of the time rightfully, and have long been miffed by weird occurrences in homes. But Pope John Paul II, late in his term, mandated each diocese to have an exorcist, and for training to be available. The training of Father Gary Thomas has been well recorded in *The Rite*, by Matt Baglio, and in the movie of the same name. The idea is not to proceed independently of evaluation by psychologists, but to proceed with all wisdom.

Several factors have stirred this greater concern, not just about possession in the strict sense, but about forms of infestation, i.e., oppressive powers taking advantage of a scarred history and psyche. To begin with, forms of fiercely resistant addiction have multiplied—from crack and other heavy drugs, to pornography, to violence. Also we realize better how deeply youth can be affected by abuse and other familial wounds. Finally, the rise of satanic cults and practices has been opening doors to a very undesirable entry.

Deliverance ministry is the more widespread approach to banishing evil influence. It is practiced by teams of laity, or clergy and laity in tandem. As explained by one of its main practitioners, Neil Lozano, in his book *Unbound*, "It is not about the devil but about true freedom," baptismal freedom, the "armoring" of Ephesians 6:10-17. Forceful prayer by the one directing the action, renunciation of specific openings to evil by the subject, and earnest prayer of a supporting team—these are the hallmarks of deliverance ministry. Everything, of course, is performed expressly in the name of Jesus. And those who speak of exorcism and deliverance, such as Father Thomas and Father





# Reason

James Torrens, S.J.

Jeffrey Grob of the Archdiocese of Chicago, emphasize the indispensable role and effectiveness of the sacraments—reconciliation and Holy Eucharist.

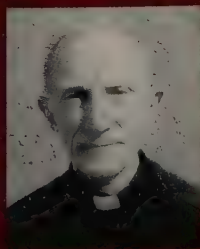
Men and women are embodied spirits. Forces of the spiritual world affect us keenly, the positive forces above all—the creative love of God, the redemptive love of Jesus Christ, the palpable guidance of the Holy Spirit. But wherever voids of meaning and value exist within a person's life, or doors have been opened by initiation to the occult, enemy spirits can enter. Who of us, in fact, does not cry out at some time or other, "Release me from the snares they have hidden" (Psalm 31)? How we welcome the words of Saint Paul: "He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). And how we need the words of Our Lord in our ears continually, "It is I, fear not."

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## DEMON-WARY

**The demon doesn't care a lick about you,  
you are worth nothing in its eyes.  
So why make such a target of you?  
You are a cynosure of God's eyes.**

**Does it harass and bedevil you  
so you cry out to be exorcized,  
or ply its old craftiness on you,  
spinning a web as for flies?**

**Does it strike fear, freezing the spunk in you,  
or leave you, clueless, to ingest its lies?  
Know that its arrow aims, through you,  
at the One incarnate, Love's big surprise,**

**Who wards the demon off you by urging,  
Be not unbelieving nor undaring.**



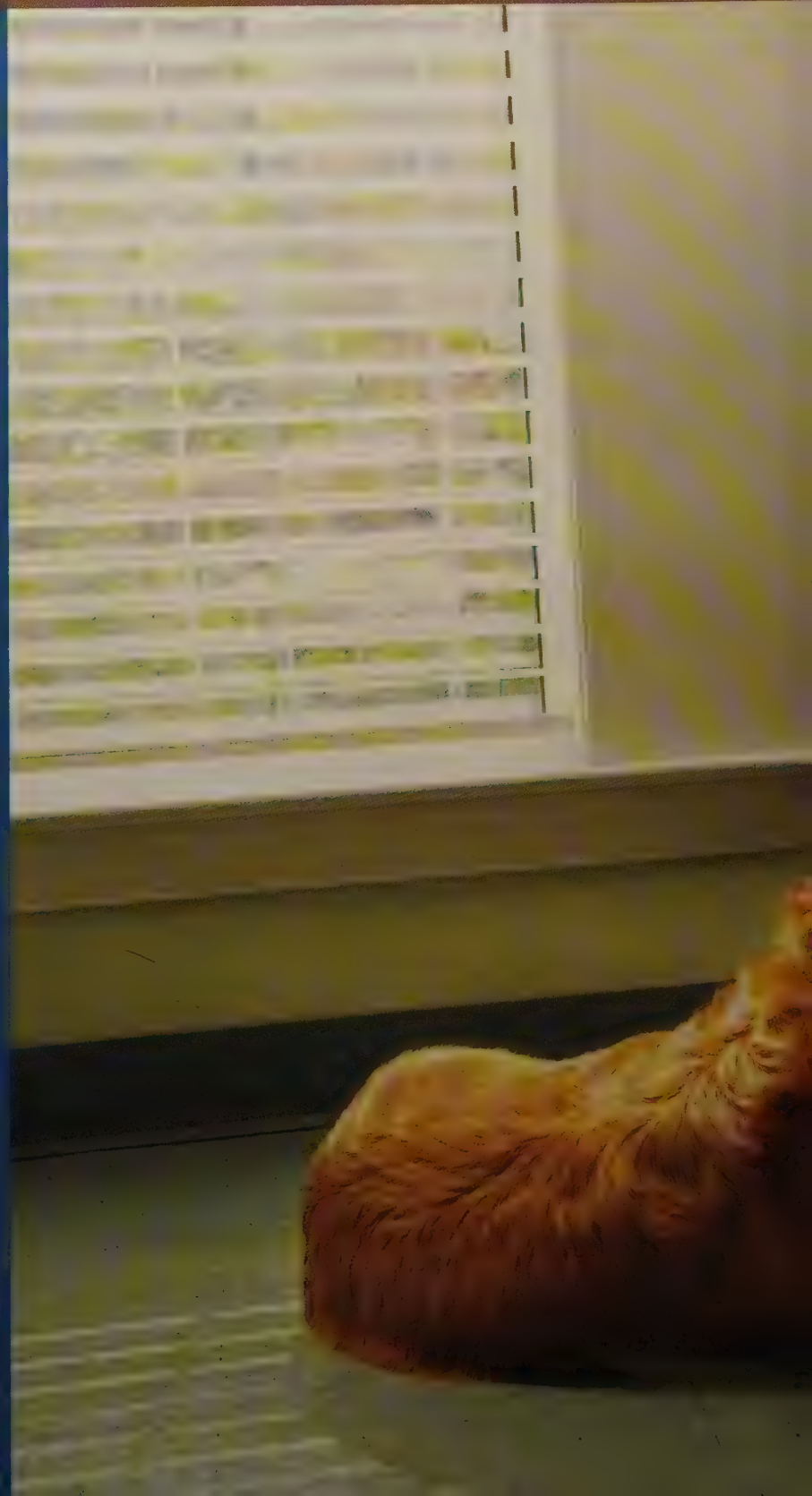
# Ministry with Dogs:

Where Spiritual and Pastoral Care Have a Wet Nose and Four Paws  
Jerilyn E. Felton, D.Min.

In an age that has come to realize the interconnectedness of all life forms, it has become apparent to many that the presence of a canine companion makes a difference in how meaningful a visit to a loved one can be. It can scarcely be doubted that dogs have found their way into the nooks and crannies of family life and that, in the United States, dogs are in many instances treated as a member of the family. Therefore, it is natural for those who have sought comfort and care from their dogs in the past to respond positively to anyone who brings a canine companion with them for a visit.

As one ages and begins to call a nursing home "home," it becomes a challenge to have even a few interactions with a beloved canine companion because many care facilities do not allow animals to visit, much less stay for any length of time. Many patients/residents/clients often feel a sense of loss that is eased, at least for a moment, if they see someone whom they trust with their spiritual care, bringing a furry, tail-wagging partner with a cold nose and four paws to them for a spiritual-care or pastoral-care visit. It seems that dogs make things better when they come.

As with any endeavor, there are both benefits and risks associated with permitting animals entrance into a









*Unless a written policy is presented along with the proposal for dog ministry, a chaplain/director of spiritual/pastoral services can meet with stiff resistance to the admission of dog-teams doing spiritual/pastoral care.*

healthcare facility. Many of the risks become immediately apparent (biting, allergies) when the discussion turns to the admission of a dog as a four-footed minister who works alongside a chaplain or spiritual/pastoral-care provider. Many of the potential risks are hidden, but could prove to have far-reaching ramifications unless these risks are anticipated and procedures put in place to minimize them.

The following discussion will present the case for the implementation of a comprehensive program for dog ministry. The program was developed over the course of a nine-month study at Maryville Nursing Home, Beaverton, Oregon. The resulting program, the Four-Footed Ministers Pastoral-Care Program<sup>1</sup>, goes a long way to meet the possible objections of administrators and the infection-control department that might be raised when the topic of dog ministry is investigated.

#### IS A PROGRAM NECESSARY?

One of the first objections often presented is encapsulated in the question of the necessity of a program in the first place. Many chaplains and spiritual/pastoral-care providers already do incorporate their dogs into their ministry in their workplace because they realize that there is an ease of connection with a patient/resident/client when facilitated by the dog; this has been preliminarily demonstrated by research in the field (see Felton, 2012 for resources). Most dogs seem to be naturally drawn to human beings and humans seem to naturally gravitate to dogs. So a spiritual/pastoral-care provider might ask, "If it is working, why do we need a program?"

Unfortunately, both administration and infection control are the first departments to question these casual dog interactions. Administration and infection-control departments often are forced to take a hard look at the reality of the societal climate where liability, defined procedures and safety issues are paramount. Moreover, unless a program is in place, the issue of continuation of dog visitations could be jeopardized if an individual chaplain should move on to other employment. Unless a written policy is presented along with the proposal for dog ministry, a chaplain/director of spiritual/pastoral services can meet with stiff resistance to the admission of dog-teams doing spiritual/pastoral care.

It is here where the program developed at Maryville Nursing Home will be instrumental in pointing a way to using dogs in ministry. This program was built on the time-tested protocols for safe interactions developed by Pet Partners®, a non-profit organization that fosters research into the animal-human bond (Delta Society, 2008). These Pet Partners® written protocols require that dog teams become registered through a series of exams that test for aptitude and skills, ensuring that a team can operate at the highest level of safety with all parties concerned. This registration, renewable every two years, is required by all dog teams working in the Four-Footed Ministers Pastoral-Care Program at Maryville. The teams come to the facility already trained and evaluated, their credentials having been issued by an independent organization.

Moreover, the issue of liability for the facility is lessened because volunteer dog teams are covered by a general liability insurance policy when volunteering.<sup>2</sup> Because volunteer spiritual and pastoral-care providers are equipped with knowledge of proper procedures of both Pet Partners® and the facility's written protocols for dog ministry and are covered by a general liability insurance policy, administration and infection control workers can feel confident that the facility has done its best to ensure safe and fruitful interactions, preliminarily demonstrated as beneficial (Felton, 2012).

#### WE'VE GONE TO VIRTUAL PETS—ARE REAL DOGS NECESSARY?

As facilities discover benefits of using virtual tools, administrators might further question the admission of dog teams, even volunteer, registered dog teams. In a fascinating study on the effects of the use of video on elder volunteers, Dr. Deborah L. Wells discovered that elders who had viewed animals on video tape exhibited the same calming effects measured in their cardiovascular system as those who had interacted with live animals (Wells 2005). While the use of virtual pets can benefit those whose medical condition would prohibit interaction with live animals, the Maryville study confirmed that it was interactions with live dogs that facilitated community and helped to alleviate isolation.





In the Maryville study, it became apparent that when the dogs (two, Four-Footed Ministers) entered the building, they immediately became the center of attention for eager elders and their family members who were excited to interact with them. Throughout the study, the individuals would seek to touch or otherwise interact with the dogs, often moving beyond the human component of the team directly to the dogs. Some individuals were happy to sit back and just look at the two dogs. The dogs constantly drew a crowd as soon as they came into the building (Felton, 2012).

In another instance, the researcher's dog occasioned a lively interaction among a study's resident volunteer and repair persons, as the following illustrates:

[The researcher and her dog, Alya, were on their rounds and found that] Deborah was in her room and was wearing a tiara emblazoned with "2011." She was in a very festive mood, anticipating the New Year's Eve party that would be taking place on the following afternoon. As there were repairs being done in her part of the facility, there were several workmen moving about. They gravitated to Alya, who [had been and] continued to lick Deborah's hand as we talked. Deborah mentioned that Alya "could not hold her licker." One of the workmen responded that she must not have her "licker license." We all got a great laugh out of that.<sup>3</sup> This

dog-ministry visit had provided Deborah with another chance to showcase her great sense of humor (Felton, 2012).

Therefore, it appeared that the interactions with live dogs, even those encounters that happened only once a week, were more effective spiritual/pastoral-care interventions because of the social-lubrication function that live dogs generate when they interact with people.

#### AN UNEXPECTED SOURCE OF RESISTANCE: SPIRITUAL/PASTORAL-CARE PROVIDERS

It appears that the most surprising objection to dog ministry seems to originate from within the circles of spiritual/pastoral-care providers. Throughout the long history of the Roman Catholic Church, service to the people of God has always assumed that true ministry (service) flows from one human person to another human person (USCCB, 2005). Perhaps because of the long history of the philosophical and theological effort to separate "the animal" from "the human" based on Scripture and philosophical thought (see the full discussion of this topic in Felton, 2012), the integration of dogs into spiritual/pastoral care seems to be an intrusion that has not been considered acceptable. The researcher contends that this unwritten warrant continues to exert its influence today despite the movement in philosophical and theological circles to have a more holistic view of creation.

Various theological camps within the greater Christian community have taken up the challenge to formulate

another paradigm for the place of creation in God's plan of salvation. Given the experience of the global crises that have occurred in the recent past such as climate change, increasing rate of extinction of species, and destruction of the natural world, the philosophical and theological perspectives of the past that worked so well are not adequate for the world we live in today. Therefore, the question of the integration of dogs into ministry so as to provide a more holistic form of spiritual/pastoral care can be viewed as an area where the movement of the Holy Spirit is evident, renewing the face of the earth (USCCB, 2005).

Apart from the discussion of dog ministry as a spiritual/pastoral-care intervention that reveals the work of the Spirit, there are the benefits that have already resulted from interactions with dogs in ministry, as evidenced from the stories of the long-term care resident volunteers who participated in the Maryville study. Here is an example of one of the many stories that reflects how important dogs were in the life of a resident-volunteer whose love of dogs was truly uplifting:

The issue of pet loss is the theme that runs through Dinah's story. Dinah was a relatively young woman who had to give away one of her beloved dogs because she could only take one dog with her to Maryville. As it turned out, when she began to decline, the care of the dog fell to staff. It was then that the dog was adopted by a staff member.

As a hospice patient, she wanted to participate in the study because, she said, it would give her a reason to live. In the initial interview, she related how her dogs gave her love and kisses when she got her terminal diagnosis that required



her to move to Maryville. She remembered how they knew that something was wrong with their "mom" and they "licked away the tears" from her eyes.<sup>4</sup>

As time progressed, she seemed to enjoy the visits with the FFM [Four-Footed Minister] dogs and was always happy to see them. We, [the researcher and her ministry volunteer], were there for her and we always prayed with her, giving her a blessing as we were about to leave. Though she had times throughout that year when she rallied physically, the strain of not having a dog of her own began to weigh heavily on her. With outside help, she moved out of Maryville at the end of 2010 to a location where she could have a 'dog of her own' (Felton, 2012).

## CONCLUSION: FROM A BEGINNING TO...?

The Four-Footed Ministers Pastoral-Care Program is in its infancy, but from its inception it focused on issues of safety, liability, and sustainability through written protocols. From the beginning of the discussions with administration before the study began at Maryville, it was apparent the all-volunteer spiritual/pastoral-care program had adequately covered the issues of safety and liability. The animals to be used in the study had been fully trained and registered by an independent entity. The facility could feel comfortable that those who participated would be knowledgeable about safe interactions and minimizing risks. Their dogs were screened for health and an appropriate level of obedience training before they began their work in the facility. The issue of general liability coverage, borne by an independent agency, further reduced concerns over potential risks of lawsuits should an accident occur. Finally, the study itself helped define written protocols that were incorporated in the *Maryville Volunteer Handbook* by the end of the study.

Though the use of virtual pets is often valuable for those who cannot or will not interact with dogs, the Maryville study seems to confirm that the interactions with live dogs and their spiritual/pastoral-care providers facilitated community. Though it can scarcely be doubted that elders in nursing homes can be susceptible to feelings of isolation, interactions with "the girls" (the Four-Footed Ministers used

in the study) went a long way toward facilitating conversation, interactions and enjoyment. The stories presented illustrate just a few instances of these potentially fruitful spiritual/pastoral-care interactions.

Finally, perhaps the most difficult objection to refute is an unwritten one—the resistance by those in spiritual/pastoral care to look at the possibilities of using dogs in ministry. The paradigmatic shift within Christian circles from the "domination over" view of nature to one of the human stewardship of creation has allowed the use of a comprehensive dog-ministry program that is "road-tested," safe, effective and sustainable. Dog-ministry programs open up avenues for exploration not possible under the philosophical and theological perspectives of the recent past.

The time has come for those in chaplaincy to look beyond human beings to other creatures as fellow co-workers. It is time for a spiritual/pastoral-care provider's working companion to have a wet nose and four feet.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The training manual developed from the Maryville study is in the process of being published. Please check the website, [www.fourfootedministers.com](http://www.fourfootedministers.com) for further information on the publication date.

<sup>2</sup>The issue of a professional chaplain's use of his or her dog in job-related activities requires further discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Chart notes: dated 12/30/2010. In order to ensure confidentiality, the names of the residents who participated were coded twice. The first level was numeric in nature and the second was the assignment of a biblical name to obscure the story's originator. The names used are those that appeared in the final presentation.

<sup>4</sup>Chart notes: dated 7/18/2010. Stories quoted from chart notes will be noted by the date alone to protect the identity of the study participant.

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Jerilyn E. Felton, D.Min., recently retired from her work at the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon to pursue her work on dog ministry in health-care facilities, the topic of her dissertation project. She continues to function in the volunteer role as the Four-Footed Ministers Pastoral-Care Program Coordinator for Maryville Nursing Home, Beaverton, Oregon.

